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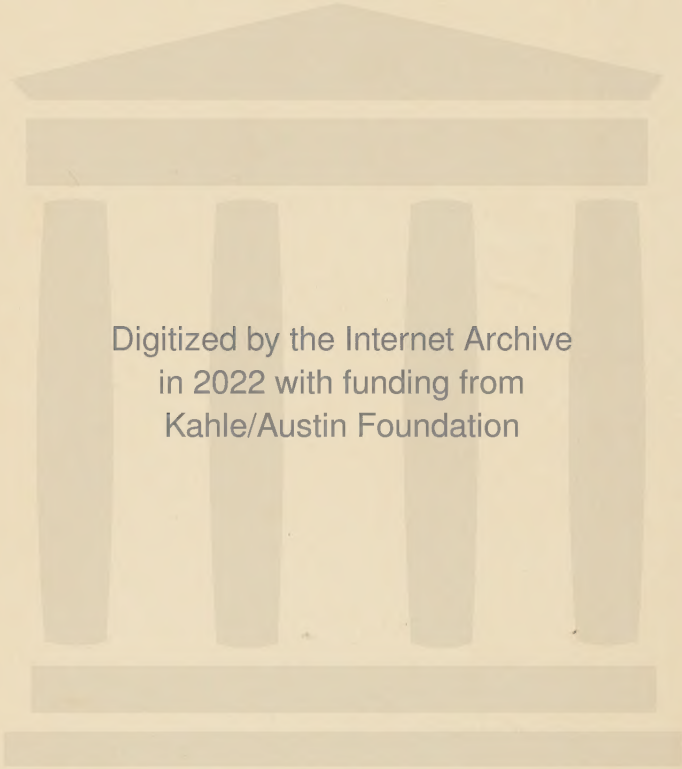
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*JOHN EASTON:*

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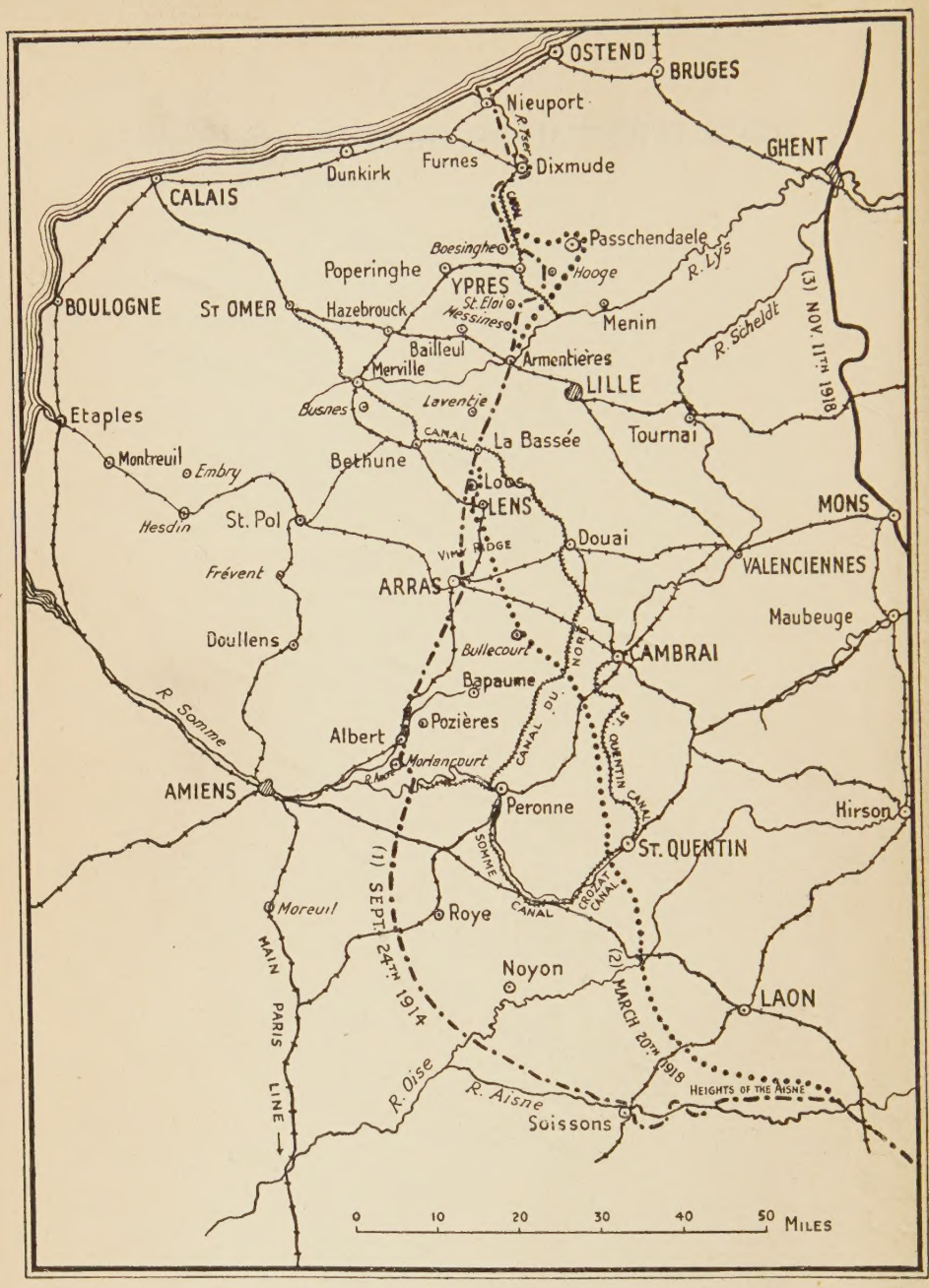
THREE PERSONAL RECORDS OF THE WAR




THE BRITISH WESTERN FRONT

# THREE PERSONAL RECORDS OF THE WAR

R. H. MOTTRAM
JOHN EASTON
ERIC PARTRIDGE

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# A PERSONAL RECORD

*by*

R. H. MOTTRAM

# A PERSONAL RECORD

THEY say we change every seven years, and are renewed bodily. If this is true, then twice over have I ceased to be that incredible person, strapped about with a set of contraptions that are already beginning to look queer, to date unmistakably, as I lay them out on the table, who, shivering cold and wet, desperately perplexed and very much in earnest, on an autumn night of 1915, found himself commanding a company of infantry, that held the fire-bays of a front line trench in Belgium. And yet, although I have twice outgrown that body, and many more times the mind of that chap, I am linked to him indissolubly by an identity to which the proper persons at his baptism gave the name which I now sign. Here is that name engraved on the butt of the clumsy Smith-Wesson revolver, and here marked with indelible pencil on some frayed straps of 'Webb' equipment, are the name and regiment, which were mine, and his. Against every feeling of probability I sit down to write out what happened to him during those years as nearly as I can remember them. The difficulty I feel in getting back to his almost alien personality is evidently not peculiar to me. Here are two others trying to do the same, and many more have tried. The avowed reason is the fact that, unless done soon, it may be too late. We have all got to die—amazing as it will seem to us, who have survived, sometimes almost alone, out of a battalion—and long before that, the process of time may make it impossible to get back, as I am now trying

to do, to the man I was on that night, and the days and nights that followed it. For although they were dreadful, I could not have foregone them. I must differ from some of my colleagues who have written on the subject, in their insistence on heroics and horrors. My impression was that most men were heroic. It was quite ordinary. The behaviour, I will maintain in the face of the whole world, of volunteer amateur infantry in the face of unparalleled dangers was heroic, if you like, but so regular as to become unremarkable. Again, cosmic murder is always horrible, but if every middle-class civilian like myself had received a fresh shock from each village street he saw full of dead bodies flung down like so many sacks of bad potatoes, he would have gone mad. He didn't. He got used to it. And, above all, I, at least, am recording fact, not constructing drama. I wish I were.

Here follows, then, no work of art. The true experiences of one individual can never be so interesting as the selected, arranged and properly presented contrasts of created character. The purpose, here, is not quite history either. It lacks the scope and documentation. It is not autobiography, for the War of 1914-1918 was not something that happened to a man or men, but something in which the major part of a generation was involved. It is, what the title says it is, a personal record. Even so, I should not have thought it worth writing, had I not discovered in the course of hundreds of conversations, that mine must have been amongst the longest and most continuous memories of the Western Front, for while I never did anything remarkable, or had any ambition for rank, I seem to have remembered more than most men. I was mainly just above the trench level, where men could seldom see or hear many

yards, and often did not know the names of the places where they fell down and slept without taking off their equipment during those quaint interludes called 'rest' —and just below the official administrative world which is bound to take a view dictated by policy, and constrained to take one dimmed by distance. I was never, from the autumn of 1916 onward, quite buried in the mud, nor ever, for more than a day or so, out of range of shell-fire, as all administrative staffs, and all troops 'in rest' were. But strongest of all is the reason that, for lack of opportunity or other cause, not twenty men have written anything intimate, either shaped into fiction or left as raw fact, about the geographically and numerically biggest military effort ever made by Great Britain, and one more can hardly be one too many.

Do I, and others, then, presume to be Rifleman Harris of the Peninsula, or Kinglake of the Crimea? Indeed no. We only suppose, in all humility, that those who are deeply interested in our country would be glad enough were there a dozen minor Harris-Kinglakes to give some ampler day-to-day account of those periods of national struggle. For our subject is our justification. However earnestly we may desire the end of all war, however faithfully we may believe that the ineffaceable shock that humanity received at that time has had lasting cautionary effects, we cannot avoid the conclusion that men and women, and especially children, are still deeply interested in War. Only Religion and Love share its fascination. The very nature and immediate results of this which we call the Great War make it desirable that the impressions of eye-witnesses should be available. So far as I am concerned, they cannot be more than that. I observed literally the injunction against the keeping of a diary, and also that as to not divulging my

whereabouts on the Western Front. My letters home, carefully preserved by loving hands, contain chiefly requests for socks, good thick hand-knitted ones, a lot of interest as to what was happening in my native city, and little else. One word more. I have tried to be elementary, for the sake of those who never saw, and one hopes will never see, what War was like.

It is, then, almost entirely a spiritual journey on which I set out to-night, sitting in comfort that is all the greater because of the weather outside—a journey back to try and recover and re-enter the body and mind of that fellow, on the fire step. The only tangible guides I have at all, besides my revolver and bits of equipment, are a map (which I subsequently 'won' from Corps Headquarters) which gives me the actual spot on which I stood, and, by some miracle, a pink field-message form, addressed 'O/C D Coy.,' asking how much S.A.A. and what grenades he possessed. This piece of paper, torn from a pad of some signaller, long since, I fear, dead, and brought to me by a runner wading in the darkness, who might have been a German, for all I could tell, except that he asked of the star-shell-chequered night if Lieutenant Mottram was there, does help me to get back to that hour. It enables me to set down the actual condition of a portion of the Western Front, as I found it, just as trench warfare set in for the winter, after the disaster at Loos, which effectively paralysed—and no wonder—such initiative as the Allies had maintained during the summer of 1915. The exact spot was to the north-east of Ypres, and was a section of the roughly semi-circular line of defence, around that mediaeval city, which, beginning at Boesinghe, on the Furnes Canal, due north of the town, and passing eastward through Hooge, at a pretty even

radius of a little more than three miles, ceased to be called 'The Salient' somewhere near St. Eloi. The importance of the place, at which two of the outstanding 'battles' of the War had already been fought, will hardly be missed by posterity. One of the main objectives of the German Armies may have been Paris. The other, competing and sometimes overriding one, was the Channel Ports. The direct corridor to these (with the exception of a tiny strip of coast-land well within range of fire from the sea) lay between the Belgian inundations that came nearly down to Boesinghe, and that queer geological accident, the gravelly Flemish hills, that began to mount a very short distance to the south of Ypres, and which indeed proved a sufficient obstacle in the critical days of 1918. Beyond that, southward, were far more indirect and heavily fortified routes, through the French Black Country and those very Picard downs that were our own sticking-place in the Somme battle. Thus the six-mile semi-circle of which Ypres was the axis, was of prime importance. These facts were of course even plainer to the well-informed German staff, and account for the enormous squandering of men in the cramped area of the Salient, by both sides, in conflicts more frequent, continuous and ineffective than were ever the more spectacular battles around Arras, at Verdun, or on the Somme. From this has arisen the now fashionable detraction from the importance of the Salient, with which I hasten to agree. Neither side ever got any credit from that miserable slaughter-yard. The one thing that rendered it permanently fascinating to strategians of both sides, was the impossibility of fortifying it. Over most of its extent, eighteen inches beneath the surface brought one to the water below, while the grey skies above never

seemed to cease their weeping. Many of the trenches, in those best days of the trench system, were mere breastworks. Men who came into the War later, went to the Somme or below it, and never knew anything but deep burrows in the chalk there, can form little idea of what it was to have no dug-outs measuring more than two feet in each direction, with six inches of water already over the 'floor,' which had in any case to be re-reserved for the two boxes of small-arm ammunition, and one containing twelve hand-grenades of the 'ball' pattern, long obsolete, which were all that I could discover, in response to the message I received on that, my first tour of duty.

I notified this fact to battalion headquarters, and should have been much more worried had I known more of the general situation. I was by no means so clear as I am now as to the importance of that mile or two of trench line. I knew roughly that we stood in trenches that had been built after the British line had been pushed back some two miles by the first use of gas in the preceding April. The remains of the Canadians' artillery, which they were unable to withdraw, and which were subsequently destroyed by our heavies, the Germans finding it impossible to move, lay in the waste of no-man's-land, here very wide and disputed, being too marshy for either side to consolidate. The sickly disheartening smell of gas still clung to the rank grass beyond our sketchy dilapidated wire. The most important thing, according to the training we had received, was to establish contact with the units on either flank. To the south, after some wading, I was able to find C Company holding isolated fire-bays very similar in general appearance to those held by my own company. Northward, however, the firing-line appeared to have

dissolved. It came to an abrupt end at what had been described to me as a bombing post, and limit of the company sector, by a sleepy and hurried subaltern from whom I took over, and who was chiefly concerned with the fact that we were, in his view, late, as always (it was impossible not to be late in the eyes of those who had been standing in water for a week). I sent my bombing sergeant to man this position with two of his crew, and with orders, when he had made himself at home, to find out where A Company continued the line, but not to go forward on patrol until I had seen him again.

All this sounds no more complicated than carrying out some specimen dispositions on a parade ground in England. But these simple operations were conducted in just those different circumstances that make up the stupefying contrast between War and Peace, and even more between Modern War and Traditional War, most of all between War in practice and War in rehearsal. Not only was the place utterly strange to all concerned, but everything had to be done below the level of the ground, and not so much in utter darkness—that might have had certain advantages—but in an intermittent, dazzling, enemy-dictated alternation of darkness and light created by German firework star-shells, that rose every moment or so, hung some seconds, illuminating that waste of undulating uncertainty, and sank, leaving one momentarily blinded. We had, of course, an insufficient supply of our own 'Verey' lights, that, shot from a sort of blunderbuss, whizzed away like a rocket, and illuminated nothing. But the main fact of that place and time, which cannot be too heavily emphasized, was that the Germans had complete superiority of fire. It was not merely that we, a relieving division, desired to get to our positions, and to allow those we relieved to

go out to rest, with a minimum of casualties, and, consequently, refrained from gun-fire and Verey light firing as far as possible. It was a far more grave and permanent factor in my first experience of a command in the trenches. Partly from the way in which they held their lines, with great economy of men, but with relative nervousness, partly because of our 'containing effort' at Hooge a week or so before, to prevent them withdrawing all reserves to meet us at Loos, partly because, as I heard a brother officer say, they had nearly a machine-gun apiece—most of all because it was the Salient, the Germans fired continuously and with very great map-accuracy. This was later the one safeguard. One did learn, after a time, on what points their machine-guns were trained or traversed, and could avoid them. Heavy shell-fire for demolition purposes was not common at night. Field-gun shrapnelling, on sights taken with great pains and care during daylight, was, in ordinary trench warfare, frequent enough, if rather sporadic. Its effect depended, in darkness, on pure chance. Of individual sniping I shall have something to say later. But the superiority of machine-gun fire alone was a very serious problem, and I had not, in those first hours, learned to dodge it. New Army officers like myself, who had arrived in such a situation as that above outlined, only with the intention of fighting, thought it was of paramount importance to overcome this superiority. While it existed (and it lasted all the winter) it meant that casualties had to be incurred in such daily necessary tasks as rationing and supplying the firing-line, through fatigue parties getting out of the trenches and going 'overland' as it was graphically called, or else the delay, and only doubtful avoidance of casualties by using the unpassably-bogged com-

munication trenches, which were 'registered' for shrapnel. Now, casualties incurred in trench-warfare meant a lessening or delaying of our power to attack and drive the Germans back, the only conscious motive that had brought the new armies into being. Because of this, and because in many cases the officers had been the recruiters of the county battalions, every casualty constituted not merely a drag on the whole machine, a gap in section and platoon that could not be filled for days, but in the ultimate, something like a breach of faith with the men, the nation, and the whole principle of entry into the War. It may be imagined, therefore, how urgent I felt it to reverse this state of things immediately. I think it was from this moment that I began to feel that utter helplessness which grew on me until at the Armistice it was my prevailing impression.

Among the general instructions given me was one that only absolutely necessary rifle fire was to be allowed, until the relief was complete. Indeed, looking over the parapet, into the impenetrable blackness, or at other moments, glaring light, from which so much lead was being emptied upon us, it did not seem likely that individual rifle fire would produce much effect. The difficulty of sighting the spot from which a star-shell had just risen, or attempting to gauge by the sound, the direction and range from which a machine-gun or fixed rifle was being fired at us, was obvious. Yet there they were, the former continually traversing our parapet, and sounding like long spikes of steel being rolled from right to left, or left to right, while the latter hit every vulnerable point—gaps in the sand-bags, the communication trench entry, the latrines—with a steady punch which I timed approximately at one a

minute, followed by the whip-lash crack that is only produced when the listener is in direct line of fire. There remained two alternatives—reliance on the everlasting artillery battle—or a raid with grenades, which required more organisation, such as the warning of battalion headquarters, and our supporting artillery, than I felt inclined to undertake, until I knew the relief was complete, or the efforts of our own machine-gun fire which might cause the industrious enemy to keep their heads down. (I pictured the Germans as standing precariously in open ditches like our own, and did not for weeks after know of the experiments they were already making in concrete emplacements, the embryo of the pill-box.) The difficulty in this case was that, of our machine-guns—we were supposed to have Maxims and Lewis guns—the former had been removed from the jurisdiction of company officers and placed under brigade orders. Leaving my platoon sergeants busy making a sort of miniature order of battle, so that I might see at a glance how our sections were distributed in the tenable fire-bays, I sought out the dug-out of the battalion machine-gun officer, but found only a sentry, my friend C—— having taken his guns along to C Company first. Of our own 'Lewis' weapons, one was either on a course of instruction, behind the lines, or had been lost at Loos and never replaced, I forget which. The surviving one was already jammed by the omnipresent mud in which its bearer had fallen while taking over the sector. Moreover I was soon aware that an eight-hours' fast, and a march (if entering the trenches of that date could be so described) of ten miles, had seriously fatigued the men, and I was making up my mind to be content to keep them under cover until rations came up, when I became aware of a commotion

to the left. It was my bombing sergeant, wading staggeringly, and muttering, when accosted, that he had been hit. In fact a bullet had ploughed his scalp from front to back, and done away with his cap, but I considered him more startled than hurt. A more serious thing was his report, which I think was: 'They've got that place absolutely taped, sir, there's nothing to be done with it!' I left him in the hands of the stretcher-bearers, to be iodined and tied up, and resume his guard without running undue risks, until I could find on what, if anything, our left flank rested. There was another matter I wanted to clear up. Not far from the communication trench, a big elm had fallen right across a fire-bay, and under cover of it a listening-post had been dug, running out perhaps twenty yards into no-man's-land. As it was already full of water and was therefore useless, I had only been concerned to see that the N.C.O. next it kept a sharp look-out for enemy bombing parties that might use it for cover. Now, however, I had a chance to see more of it, and as my own servant had been chosen on account of his being a valet in private life, and not for sprightliness, I took the corporal from that bay, a youngish, athletic fellow, and scrambled out. It is not so easy as it sounds to crawl and climb over ground covered with liquid mud, in winter clothes, with equipment, weapons, and various utensils strapped upon one. (There were no regular bye-laws for raiding, then.) There had been, during the summer, a proper entry from below the parapet to the now flooded mole-hole, but as I had found water flowing thence into our sufficiently inundated defence works, I had it blocked up and took the higher way. I became suspicious directly we got through our ragged but sufficient wire, on account of the lack of enemy fire against

that portion of our defences. Even when we got beyond the tree, and were trying, by the aid of the illumination provided by the enemy every other moment, to see the nature and extent of the listening-post, we seemed to be in a wedge of quiet. Reports, thumps of bullets on the parapet, the shriek of ricochets, went on on either side of us, but nothing near us for some yards. This facilitated our feeling our way round what seemed nothing but a big shell crater, full of noisome water, which constituted, apparently, the listening-post, and had been left unwired, I suppose, for inconspicuousness and egress on raids. We were doing this in the most treacherous light, as no star-shells were being fired opposite us, but only at a considerable distance to each side, thus throwing very long, faint and indistinct shadows, when there was a commotion and a splash on the other side of the listening-pond. My corporal and I both fired, more by faith than sight, and falling star-shells left us in total blackness and further commotion. I suppose we both thought of making a prisoner and jumped forward, with the result that we both lost our footing and fell into the water. I don't know how long we took to scramble out, not many seconds certainly, if only from utter disgust at the horrible-smelling mixture, but it was time enough for the enemy to depress his fire so that the air above us and the ground all round seemed to be tightly laced with whizzing bullets, striking sparks from any hard object, or going so close to our heads that we had the sensation of tiny draughts blowing. This may have been mere nerves, but the impact all about was actual enough and made us bury literally our noses in the slimy weed-grown earth. I have a recollection of my fingers finding some hard material just in front of us, which may have been the edge of a small

farm track known as Admirals Road that ran near that spot. The camber of this long-since-destroyed bye-way was perhaps four inches, and I can only think that this saved us. I do not know how long we lay there, while scores of star-shells now blazed continuously along the enemy's lines, and I kept my face down. My corporal gave a sort of grunt, and in answer to my enquiry, said he thought someone had got hold of his heel. Eventually the racket subsided, the lights lessened, and we were able to crawl back, an inch at a time, to the tree, and thus, calling as loudly as we dared to our sentry over the parapet, into the fire-bay. The men of the half-section that held it had not, luckily, fired, for fear of hitting us, and were glad enough to see us back. This experience was a lesson. It was also a great benefit, and was the only time I was thoroughly warm that week. The corporal found his foothold lopsided and said: 'Look here, Sir, what them B——s ha' done to me!' I bent down and my torch revealed that the heel was shot off his left boot, so that I suppose we lay out there with heels higher than our heads.

On going to see the rations, that had now come up, distributed, I found that we had two men killed, both shot through the head, I am afraid from looking over the parapet into the machine-gun traversing. When assured that the bodies had been placed out of the gang-way, which ran along behind the fire-bays, at a distance of some five yards, and that an N.C.O. was making up those pathetic little bundles of 'deceased's effects' for transmission home, and that the remainder of the two platoons were eating such a meal as was possible, I got into the dug-out that was more or less sheltering the reserve ammunition, to which two further boxes had now been added, and took my first bite since noon. It

was nearly midnight, and although lighting a fire was out of the question, I can only say that I even now vividly recollect the zest of that meal. Eaten by the reflection of the enemy's flares in the stagnant water outside, it consisted of bully beef dug out of the tin with my knife, bread that had, of course, been carried in a sand-bag whose bearer had fallen into various shell-holes, from darkness and fatigue, if he had not been hit, and which therefore tasted of the contents of shell-holes, that is, human remains, various chemicals, excreta, well-manured Belgian farm soil, and rain-water—and, to finish with, cheese that survived it all. Against such disadvantages must be set youth and health, and an emotion I simply do not know how to describe, without distorting it—a pride intenser than I had ever felt or shall ever feel again, in the responsibility of even so subordinate a command in a fight against what one felt to be, not so much national or racial antagonists, as Tyranny. I do not recollect that I took long, however. The situation was too urgent, and I suspect too wet and cold. I went along the sector, and saw, for the first time, that typical scene. There was nothing whatever to be done. Even had shovels and bags, wire and pickets been brought up—and the tour was yet too unorganised to permit of it—I cannot believe that work could have availed much, for it only meant adding fresh gobbets of liquid mud to our dissolving defences. There was at that time no wood available for building purposes, save a few 'duckboards,' but the lack of another sort of wood —kindling—was already hastening their destruction, where shell-fire spared, or the swamp failed to engulf them. I little thought how the problem of firewood was to influence my view of the War. The lesson was learned that first night, and never again did D Company fail to

relieve in the line, without pieces of dry wood inside their shirts—the one safe place.

As it was, on that night the nervousness, or whatever it was that kept the Germans so energetic, forbade lighting fires in the open, and there was no overhead cover in the battalion sector. Thus there was absolutely nothing for the men to do but crouch against the parapet and smoke, with one sentry per fire-bay. The N.C.O.'s had lists to complete, sixteen pairs of already holey rubber wading boots had been discovered, and were distributed to stretcher-bearers and other specialists, and we sat down to wait for the dawn.

It came, heralded by a sudden increase in machine-gun fire, and sporadic shelling. I went along myself to see that everyone was standing-to and that fires were being lighted, now that their glow was less noticeable and before their smoke was visible. At the foot of the communication trench I was to meet F., the company commander, just back from some stunt, I cannot remember if it was a course of training or the distribution of the M.C. he had gained at Loos. S., the commander (*pro tem.*) of C Company, met me there, as he was also expecting to be relieved. I remember the faint flush in the sky, the racket all round, the murmur of our men stirring about, and S., standing knee-deep, solemnly lifting up first one leg and then the other, to empty the water out of his waders. This was purely a ceremony, as they filled again immediately. F. arrived punctual and cheery, with the commander of C Company, and I pointed out the principal elements in the situation, the whereabouts of supplies, the need of further indents, and the disposition of sections and the N.C.O.'s. S. did the same on his side, and he and I were then free to scramble up the C.T. to the support line where hot

drink awaited us; we were still very military, and there was no provision for food for officers in the fire-bays, nor could they sleep during daytime, as some proportion of the men were supposed to do. Imagine, then, the sensation of arriving in the support line after much dodging and ducking, for the C.T. was enfiladed by machine-gun fire, as well as shelled, and was, moreover, nearly impassable, so that S. made all the time-honoured jokes about swimming the Channel and seeing the lights of Calais ahead. I crawled into one of the dug-outs of the period, which contained my head and shoulders, and took off my sodden boots, puttees and breeches, and wrapped myself in a blanket. F.'s servant brought me some gritty bacon, toasted over a candle, biscuit, marmalade, 'butter' and a tin of hot tea. He also pointed out that, on the ledge above my head, was a mug of rum. I drank it off and lay down and slept deliciously. It was not until midday that I was roused, and it was made plain to me that I had consumed the rum ration issued for six officers supposed to be with the company. I cannot say I felt any ill-effects. On the contrary.

Such was my first night in the line. It seems necessary now to describe the organisation in which I played, and was to play for years, a subordinate part. The Ypres Salient, a curve of which the base, from Boesinghe to St. Eloi, was about 11,000 yards, was held by two out of the fifteen Army Corps of the entire eventual British Army. Corps were at that time almost stationary, some of them held the same Corps sector for years. Of these two, one ruled from Boesinghe to the Menin road that runs roughly east from Ypres to Hooge, and divided the Salient in two, the other from thence to St. Eloi. Each Corps was nominally, and then in fact, composed of three divisions, one of which was at least ten miles

back, at Corps Rest. The divisions holding the trenches were very much more self-complete then than they subsequently became. They still bore traces of their recruiting districts, Highland, Lowland, Yorkshire, Midland or London, Welsh, Irish. Each contained three brigades or twelve battalions of infantry, approximately ten thousand bayonets, three brigades, or nine batteries of field artillery, thirty-six guns, two field companies of engineers and one of signals, three field ambulances, four companies of A.S.C. There were also, then, at the divisional commander's disposal a squadron of cavalry, some cyclists, heavy guns and transport details, all of which were later detached one by one and placed under Corps or Army command.

Of the three infantry brigades that shared each divisional section of the Corps sector, one would be back in divisional rest near rail-head, two occupied the Divisional Sector, placing two of their battalions in the line. Each battalion usually put three companies into the trenches and kept one not further back than the Canal bank—that is, out of bullet range, but within that of enemy field artillery. Each company put two platoons into the fire-bays of the advanced or firing-line, one in support, and one in reserve. In theory, battalions should have relieved each other every four days, and brigades at intervals of a few weeks. Whole divisions should have changed from the line to the Corps rest area, miles away, every three months; but this was rarely possible until later in the War.

Such at least was the scheme, on paper. Even so it was open to the grave criticism that men, and volunteers at that, were being used for a very wasteful, stationary, and purely defensive war, which Germany carried on chiefly with machine-guns, and France with its cele-

brated 75 mm. field-guns. In practice it worked, in patches. Divisional Reliefs were carried out, always late, but with fair regularity until the major offensives abbreviated them so that they were unrecognisable. As a rest, they were, however, effective as far as they went. Brigade relief meant sleeping during the day in towns like Poperinghe or Bailleul or Béthune, with a certain amount of shelling and bombing, and going up at night to dig. (Bombing we then thought a treat by comparison, and the bombs, truly, were not the monstrosities they afterwards became.) Still, games were possible, and certain entertainments flourished, pierrot troupes, boxing tournaments, cinemas, and it was possible to supplement rations by purchases or by frequenting restaurants. Battalion rest seldom got back farther than one of the camps that were liable to shell-fire. It was possible to walk about upright in daytime, with care, even to march to the nearest bath-house to change clothes and de-louse. But the digging was nearer and more incessant, and as the distance was short, it meant marching instead of using the train that assisted the efforts of Divisional reserves. The actual reliefs between companies and platoons in the line, were simply moving from one wet patch to another. When it was discovered —and it did not take many days—that men who have been standing in water for even forty-eight hours are no longer in a fit state to march as a soldier is supposed to be able to do, not to speak of undertaking offensive operations, these reliefs were made to recur more frequently. Even so, the sickness at the end of our first turn in the line, which was eight days, was very heavy.

Here I must diverge to describe what sort of people we were, who officered the New Army, as it was still called by real soldiers. F., the company commander,

was typical of what I may call the semi-soldier type. The military type proper were either officers in reserve or Sandhurst cadets who would have been soldiers by profession in any case. F.'s was the type of public-school men who were probably destined for some other profession. He may have been of age, but I doubt it, and many of the graces of his University hung about him, sportsmanship, conscious and boundless ability, a contempt for any tobacco save very good cigars. He was one of the few who seemed to enjoy the War, with an almost righteous satisfaction. Of the same sort was A., a platoon commander, merry, but not of such spartan stuff as F. He lamented over our baths in a brewery vat, our 'comic' food supply. I remember his saying to a harassed mess-orderly, 'I want a knife—the thing you cut with, y'know!' Another platoon commander was B., a civil servant, I believe, taciturn, competent, but with a curious undercurrent of feeling, due, possibly, to the fact that his elder, much-loved brother had just been killed. These were the only four officers with the company. I do not think we were ever up to the establishment strength of six officers, except, perhaps, just before the Somme. Thus, holding our company portion of the battalion sector, with two platoons in the fire-bays, one in support and one in reserve, as officers had to be on duty the whole time, it was necessary to change them frequently, and F., A. and I had to 'live' in support, and take eight-hour shifts in command in front. This left each of us eight hours' sleep and eight hours to superintend the digging and other work of the platoon in support. B. had his platoon in reserve, a thousand yards back, and could sleep during part of the day, and be ready to superintend ration and other parties which he had to find from his command, be-

cause the battalion dump, to which horse-transport brought rations and supplies, lay in his 'line.' So far the officers. The men had less responsibility, and as it turned out, less danger. In my regiment the eventual total of officer casualties was five times as large as that among other ranks, in proportion to numbers. But they had, through their comparative immunity from moving about in exposed places, the disadvantage that they could seldom move enough, in winter time, to keep warm. Thus, although less fatal, the actual disability, while they remained unhit, was greater. Next to the military type proper, and the semi-military that contained F., A. and B., came the bulk of New Army officers, men like myself, over thirty years of age, and mainly with some years of professional or business career behind them. How had we come into the War? We had nearly all enlisted in the ranks, and although there must have been great variations, amid so many hundreds of thousands, in the motive, I believe in the main that none of my sort had any military instinct and very little class consciousness. Had Germany attacked Russia, and remained on the defensive, on the Rhine, I doubt if we should ever have enlisted. The invasion of France and Belgium and the bombardment of our own coasts decided us and we went to put things straight again. I never heard the invasion of Germany mentioned except in joke, and I am quite sure that if we had had any inkling of what the last year of War and first of Peace were to be like, most of us would never have gone, and we should have been an awkward lot to conscript. How were we enlisted? In 1914, so utterly unprepared were we that the dominant note of those days was one of uncomprehending enthusiasm veiled by comedy. The N.C.O. who received us in the Drill

Hall, that August, began: 'Now, then, answer your names, those of you who can remember the names you enlisted under!' He took us for 'Tommies,' as Wellington said, 'enlisted for drink!'

Again, the Territorial Officer in charge of recruitment, who was also a magistrate, fixed one of us with his eye:

'Where have I seen you before?'

'You was on the Bench, sir.'

'Poaching, was it?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Will you go straight if I let you enlist?'

'Yes, sir.' He did, to Gallipoli.

And between the poacher and myself, the bank clerk, stood one for whom a large car called to take him home from drill, and who gave sumptuous dinners after which officers were invited to take wine with him. Other recruits were forcibly reclaimed by female relatives and employers.

The Regimental Police Sergeant also had his joke.

'Mottram, have you been to the recruiting room this morning?'

'No, Sergeant.'

'Well, I have. They were a dirty lot to-day. The M.O. was ordering them baths. Just as I came away I heard him ask one of them, "Which bank do you say you come from?"'

I, at least, was more serious, and as soon as I could, took aside one of the few veterans, on the breast of whose tweed jacket were sewn the South African ribbons.

'Look here,' I demanded, 'this drill is all very well, but you don't tell me that when you find yourself under fire, you give the order "At the halt, on the left, form

platoon!" What did you do, when you found yourself in the scrap at Paardeberg?'

'I got under a waggon,' was the reply, which I am now persuaded was both sensible and true. At the time I didn't believe it and could see no possibility of driving the Germans out of Belgium on such lines.

Training was healthy and enjoyable, and the feeling of defending one's own coast a proud one. With what dismay, then, did I, a platoon sergeant, hear the gruff voice issuing from the beribboned chest of the Regimental Sergeant-Major—not the waxed-moustache, bulgy-eyed type of caricature, but an older, graver, almost sacerdotal soldier.

'Young fellow, you ought to take a commission!'

'I'd rather stay with this crowd, sir!'

'Can't help it. You ought to go!'

I filled up some forms, received the colonel's benediction, and was astounded to find myself gazetted and posted. I had become an officer, I perceived with resolute consternation.

Followed more training, learning the things I had taught as a sergeant. First there was the O.T.C. at Harrogate. Here I learned to be knocked over by gigantic Toronto Highlanders in bayonet charges that never occurred in any field of battle. Here also we got news of the landing in Gallipoli, and, simultaneously, it now seems, of the first gas attack at Ypres. The Canadians left us that night. I can see one of them, white as a sheet, reading some communication that had reached him from the First Canadian Division.

Then there was the Reserve battalion at Colchester, the immense parades and marches, range practice and camp life. Most of us enjoyed it, I believe. We were immensely fit, if occasionally impatient. It created one

notable illusion, that the War would be fought with the rifle. This was no one's fault. It was a most plausible view.

On the morning that the Battle of Loos began, being assistant adjutant, I opened the mail in the Orderly Room at the barracks and found myself ordered to France with others. So it had come at last, and most inopportunely, as my father lay very ill, dying, in fact. This sounds bathos, but I do not know how else to convey the first realisation of what War was, the utter dislocation of the decent, steady life that I and mine had led for generations. I got a few hours' leave, and then dashed off for Folkestone.

It was there and at Boulogne that I first found out for what I had enlisted. The arrangements were puerile in their inefficiency, and it was with great difficulty that I and others found our way to the Base Camp at Etaples, which was full of officers and men and bankrupt in accommodation. It was filled with a great mass of volunteers, eager to fight, and deep down beneath them could occasionally be discerned the thin ossified structure of pre-War military organisation, whose executives bickered amongst themselves while we stood about in the rain. There were awful scenes when the Director of Reinforcements tried to post Highland officers to county regiments they had never heard of.

There were neither baths nor canteens available, and although gas had been in use for months, there were still being issued, as protection, lengths of black veiling, with a little pad of cotton wool, which we were instructed to moisten in a primitive manner. At last we got 'orders' (indecipherable), found our way to a train and set off. Arrangements were so bad that we had to live on iron rations until we got to Poperinghe.

For we did eventually arrive at that village of unpre-

cedented importance. In the evening sky a 'plane hovered, surrounded by puffs of smoke, the station was deserted, and above a distant rumble and popping that had been audible for some time there arose a regular, near and drawn-out crash. Around the Flemish-School picture made by the towers and gables of the town, a great cloud of brick-dust bellied out, while in measure with it rose a clamour of shrieks, falling masonry, footsteps and scatteration. It was our 'baptism of fire,' totally unlike any such ceremony in history, typical of the War. The Germans were firing from a distance of nearly twenty miles with the regularity and precision of a machine in a factory. I enjoyed it, and felt perfectly confident of dodging such a demonstration and of presently going forward and putting the gunner out. At the moment, the thing was to find the battalion which I had no doubt was in action, and after some search in silent and deserted streets, we did find a limber from the transport lines, hiding.

It grew dark as we rattled over the pavé, and after an hour's jogging were decanted into a wet field at the end of which glimmered the lantern of the guard-tent. We went into the farmhouse and reported, and I could not at first understand the warmth of our welcome. It was only after I had eaten and drunk that I discovered that the dozen officers round the table were the survivors, just dragged out, of Loos, and that we four newcomers did not make the battalion establishment up to half its strength. Some of the men were in a dreadful state, without rifles or equipment, and it had not been possible to ascertain the number of casualties. The following day, after standing about for an hour, I asked F., to whose company I had been posted, whether there was anything for me to do.

He replied, 'Nothing,' and his silence and gravity gave me a first glimpse of what he had been through.

Next day, however, I managed to get taken into the trenches with the guides for the next relief. We got a lift to Brielen (further than ever again, as the leaves were still on the trees, and screened us), found a pontoon bridge over the canal. The peculiarity of the modern battlefield struck me at once—the enormous noise, continuous explosion, deserted landscape, complete immobility of everything. We then engaged in a narrow ditch called a communication trench, and soon, overhead, came that fateful whispering of bullets with an occasional thump, or the 'whee' of a ricochet. Under a barricade we came out into the trenches of a regular battalion. Gullies branched on all sides, mostly very wet. Men were eating, smoking, doing odd jobs. No one was fighting. A few were peering into periscopes or through loopholes. I tried both and could see nothing whatever but upturned empty fields. Then, suddenly, there was a terrific crash that flung me yards. I picked myself up and did my best to laugh. Near by, a man lay with a tiny hole in his forehead, and close to him another limped and crawled with blood pumping out of his leg. They were carried away, the latter bandaged, the former now beyond it. These were the first casualties I saw and were typical. I shall not describe the subsequent ones at length. I was quite clear that a casualty was not a matter for wonder or horror but for replacement. I regarded the incessant bombardment as temporary and expected every moment to see men going over the top to put the guns out of action. Nothing happened, however, and I went on with the guide, between narrow, sand-bag walls, blood-and-dirt-stained, frequently collapsed or knocked about, ill-smelling,

inconvenient and full of racket and humanity, everywhere bombarded. I took some notes and made my way back to my battalion. That was how I first saw the War.

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Wet day succeeded wet day of that cold and premature Autumn. After forty-eight hours I found many of the men to be in such a bad state that I spoke very urgently to F. about it. And then, at that early date, the disadvantage of the structure of the New Armies, and the type of warfare in which they were engaged, came to light. I was well enough aware of the shortness of my training and total inexperience of war. I had expected to be guided by orders from old regular soldiers like the Colonel and Adjutant. In practice, however, we were almost as much cut off from battalion headquarters as from brigade, which seemed as distant as England. You could wire to either place, but to get there and obtain any detailed information meant neglecting either frequent and urgent turns for duty, or the short time available for sleep and food. Above such considerations was the stronger one that a platoon commander who took the matter as seriously as I did then, could not go hanging round battalion headquarters. His company commander was his direct chief, and could not be missed out. I therefore had a very serious conversation with F. on the third morning when he relieved me at dawn, as to the condition of the men, and their total unfitness to undertake any offensive operation. He pooh-poohed, not so much the facts, as my attitude of mind. The men would do as they were ordered. There was nothing for it but to shut up. But after sleep and food and reflection—if one can be said to reflect, crouching in a wet rabbit-hole, with considerable, if irregular gun-fire going on, and nothing dry about one,

as the water was now standing in the support line almost as much as in the fire-bays—I wrote out a report in my field message book, in the approved style we had been taught in the O.T.C., setting out the state of affairs, and suggesting a system of moving patrols to hold the fire-bays. This was not pure invention, but was partly prompted by the fact that I suffered less from exposure than the men, owing to the fact that my responsibilities, as an officer, kept me on the move, and partly from study of the enemy movements and habits. Such crawling about no-man's-land as we had managed to perform since my first essay in the listening-post, had revealed nothing but the dense hedge of German wire, and the fact that the continuous machine-gunning and star-shell illumination came from a long way back —nearly a thousand yards, so far as I could judge by the fall, at a very sharp angle, of bullets behind our parapet. That enemy patrols came right up to our wire at times, I did not doubt after the first night. It followed that the trench, whatever it was called, that the enemy had most advanced, and just behind his wire, was not regularly held at all. At least we could see and hear nothing, and grenade-throwing produced no response. I was merely combining this fact with the obvious advantage of keeping our men fit and—shall I say interested—for the utter disgust and disappointment of those volunteers was audible enough to any officer who kept his ears open during his peregrinations. They had come out to fight, not to sit still and be shot to bits. The trouble was that there was no decent opportunity to discuss such a matter. I only saw F. when he was preoccupied or nearly dead with fatigue, and could hardly ask him to consider a report, in either state of mind. Nor was there any place for debating ways and

means. So that I simply handed in my report and asked him to read it at leisure. I did persuade him to carry out an inter-platoon relief, those from support and reserve going down into the fire-bays, and the first occupants coming back to places in which, at least, their puttees could be changed. It made no difference to the officers, of course. A. went back to reserve, F., B. and I taking turns to command in front, in support, or to rest a bit.

It was only on these occasions—in my own case, between getting up and eating anything that could be found under such conditions for our company mess, and general stand-to at dusk, when I took over the front line until dawn—that I could get any idea of what the place looked like. In the northern half of the Salient there was a gentle undulation of the ground, not sufficient to be called a hill, that hid the town of Ypres from the German lines, except on the extreme northern flank. As our trenches were on the eastern, or outer slope, of this, we could see nothing but the solid bank of enemy wire, and the endless complexities of his parapet, mound after mound rising away to the sky-line and always seeming higher than ours. Beyond that, the mist or rain, always one or the other, hid the horizon, and nearer were shattered trees, splintered into incredible fan-shaped stumps, here and there some faint remains of brickwork or paved or metalled roads. Flanders is not a country of hedges, and in any case the involved windings of the trenches half simulated, half hid, any that existed. So much, in fact, had the ground been disturbed by digging and shell-fire, that any clear-cut picture is impossible. It was incredibly easy—in fact, it was usual—to lose oneself in what appeared to be a maze of collapsed sewers by day. By night, over and over again, parties got out of the communication

trenches, and struck across the open, sacrificing some small protection for the sake of freedom of movement, and, as time went on, the greater protection of being away from any object the Germans could photograph and so shoot at. Their firing by map was wonderful. They must have had the completest scheme of our defences and registered every vulnerable point. After losing many men in latrines, those in front line threw their sewage over the parapet into the wire, those in support used the spoil-pit behind the trench. Thus even our little company cemetery was a dangerous place, some cautious German gunner having found traces of digging there and registering upon it with great care. This he did with such perfect discipline, that it became a safeguard. Early in the day, obviously just after a good breakfast, one could almost hear him carefully measuring off the range of the appointed spot. Pop went his gun, but before that there had already reached us, whizz, bang, his shell. It fell twenty yards beyond some forlorn attempt to get two sand-bags to stand above water! Two minutes would elapse. One could almost hear the conversation over the telephone, the meticulous altering of the elevation. Whizz, bang! This time ten yards short! (Here we saw what he was after and moved our men.) Another short interval of almost prayerful preparation. Whizz, bang! Plumb on the spot. That was German gunnery. Now, even at that period we could reply with artillery, and did most effectually. But the point which can never be sufficiently understood is that infantry are helpless before all artillery and most machine-gun fire. Our artillery could reply to the German artillery, we could reply to their machine-gun and rifle fire, but neither of these efforts could be any real protection. The men who carried out any duty in

the least exposed were hit just the same. Again and again I tried to evolve some scheme for obtaining superiority of fire, spending hours lying out in various selected spots. My eyesight is extremely good. Even to-day I wear no spectacles. I had a very good pair of binoculars and had qualified pretty well in musketry. But it was the rarest thing to catch a glimpse of something moving amid the confusing dim heaps of soil and débris, wire and tattered trees. Sometimes I tried a shot. There was no such close liaison between infantry and artillery on our side as on the Germans', partly because, of the nature of the ground, partly on account of our guns' heavier calibre and longer range, partly because the Salient having a bad name, few artillery commanders would trust their guns eastward of the Canal. I had therefore to judge the range (the sort of places in which I lay up were not suited to a Barr and Stroud range-finder), and the only satisfaction I can record was that whenever I fired I saw no subsequent movement. Caution, perhaps. Even so, this sort of thing could not be practised on any large scale, points of vantage being too few, enemy machine-gun fire too insistent.

Much has been said about the deadly German sniper. I saw little evidence of him. I know that subsequently very finely-equipped rifles were found in their trenches, which gave colour to the idea. I cannot imagine the German being so unbusiness-like as to fire by sight when he had abundant machinery to put up regular barrages that were far more certain of hitting somebody than the finest single shot ever was of hitting anybody under trench conditions. I frequently found I had exposed myself while busy over some problem of drainage or storage. No sniper ever shot at me. On the other hand, I got a bullet through the peak of my cap

in the middle of the night, moving carelessly into what I knew to be an enfiladed spot, to see to the housing of a relief of machine-gunners. This problem was confined, of course, to sectors where the trenches were relatively far apart. Where no-man's-land was only a score of yards, the rifle went clean out of use, and grenades of all sorts were the weapon. There was plenty to be done. Pumps appeared on the scene, carried up by laborious parties, but it was weeks before the work was organised on a sufficiently comprehensive scale to be other than the emptying of water out of one trench into another. We tried, what is called in Norfolk, 'Dydling,' scooping out the liquid mud with shovels, when, eventually, these implements reached us. But wherever a shovel appeared, or a pump nozzle, there was the same painstaking registering by the enemy, the same hurried removal of our men, and interruption of the work until nightfall. There was no effective means of improving our conditions without far better organisation and many more supplies than we then possessed.

Have I conveyed the preliminary impression necessary to understanding the war we then waged? I do not know how else to render its utterly novel and perplexing character. The remoteness of the unseen enemy, the impossibility of personal hatred, the inversion of all the usual tactics, so that the 'brave soldier' of history, marching forward with his bayonet fixed and his rifle at the 'engage,' was no longer a hero, but a fool and probably a criminal—such were the factors of the situation in which we found ourselves.

I hope I do not sound as if I complained of anyone. To make this clear, I must next go on to describe a journey (it was about five hundred yards in a straight line) I made at F.'s suggestion to battalion headquarters.

It took over an hour with elaborate precautions. Even so, I and the 'runner' I took with me, feeling that one could not have too many people with some knowledge of the way about, in view of our daily casualty list, blundered into two other battalions before we crawled and slipped (there was no question of going overland in daylight) into a largish dug-out, on the summit of the undulation. Here I found the Colonel, the only surviving Major, and the Adjutant. As I look back on it now, there is something touching about the picture they presented in the candle-lit subfusc noon. All regular soldiers, their faces were masks of the approved pattern. All of them had been under fire in South Africa, Egypt, or on the Indian Frontier. Their servants had brought up their camp-beds and paraphernalia, and there they sat, commanding the battalion. That is to say, the helplessness of the rest of us was relieved by the necessity to eat, drink and sleep, even to make some sort of toilet, all difficult and dangerous adventures. These senior officers had nearly everything done for them. They had, therefore, absolutely nothing to do save to pass on to Brigade the indents for stores and reports of casualties. There was a rumour that the commander of the preceding battalion had had his horse brought up to the dug-out in daylight. I myself thought that the tremendous smoke made by the battalion headquarters mess kitchen, adjoining the dug-out, was sufficient to make them a mark to German gunners. Anyhow, they were being shelled. It was eight- or nine-inch stuff, steady, persistent. And they could not shift, as we, in the lines, shifted our men. They bore it, even if they did not grin, with admirable stoicism. I shall never forget the Major sitting there with all his English-field-officer plus all his English-country-gentleman's contempt for

the expression of any feelings whatever. A lump of shell-case, result of an explosion that scattered all the objects on the table, came through the wall above his head, and embedded itself with a 'whump' in the opposite wall. Where it cut through the sand-bags it let a thin trickle of dark Flanders earth fall on his crop head and strong red neck. He stuck it for a moment or two and then moved, with an exclamation of annoyance, wiping himself. Clearly his annoyance was not with the shell, but with the fact that he was obliged to notice it. I am not, for one moment, laughing at him. His sang-froid was precisely the quality that has maintained, in odd corners of the earth, tiny British Armies in the face of enormous odds. His sort had died fighting, to a man, at Maiwand and Isandhlwana. Had it been possible he would have led us, I feel sure, to gallant extinction in front of the German wire. But the nature of this new war forbade him. Or, had the Germans only attacked as they were supposed to attack, in dense mass formations, with what coolness would he not, I feel sure, have ordered me, somewhat to this effect:

'Hold your fire, Mottram, until they come to two hundred yards. You have your range-finder!' as I was always hoping he would.

Alas! that also was impossible. All that he and the Colonel could do, was to ask about the condition of the men, and the state of the line. I replied fully and correctly as I could. I was only too pleased to do so. It seemed like getting something done. I did not reflect that F. had already passed them my report and that they considered it grossly unmilitary. Nor did I grasp that they found me—I was wearing a woolly sleeping-cap, my uniform one being soaked and cut nearly in half, a blood-and-muck-smeared raincoat, with a private's

Webb equipment over it, sand-bags bound round my shins while my puttees were drying, boots that squelched as I walked, and was leaning on the branch of a tree I used for testing the depth of the water we had to wade ––more like a scarecrow than an officer in a celebrated line regiment. In fact, it was easier for me to adjust myself to the actual conditions, by inexperience, than it was for them to do so by their twenty or thirty years' knowledge of real 'soldiering.' They heard what I had to say, and silence, punctuated by terrific shell-bursts, succeeded. They offered me a drink, which I accepted, and then asked if I might go back to my company, as I was nearly due to relieve B. in the fire-bays. I was dismissed with nodded approval. In spite of the unhealthiness of the spot, I had a good look round. Our own artillery was now tuning up, in retaliation, and I noted with comfort big bursts beyond Hooge on the right and over Pilkem on the left, then dived for the C.T. to resume my duties.

I think it was on this occasion that I met B. at the foot of the C.T. in the front line. He wrung my hand and said:

'Good-bye, old chap, if I never see you again!'

I treated it as a joke, but found when I got about, that there had been a good deal of shelling and that the horrid job of lugging bodies (always of one's best, that is, most active men, necessarily) on to a collapsed dug-out which we used as a mortuary, until burial was possible, so that they did not impede the work and lower the morale of the rest, had got on his nerves, upset by his brother's death. Nothing happened to me, however, except that I committed a gross breach of etiquette by accepting a drink of 'pozzy' (? posset: hot tea, rum and sugar) from the sergeant of the nearest platoon. But B.

was queer in the head next day, and F. and I divided his noon-to-dusk turn; and it was then, to my astonishment and pride, I suddenly found myself face to face with the Brigadier. There he was, red tabs, cap and all, an orderly from B.H.Q. as guide, not an attendant officer. He sploshed about in our filthy sty, asked questions, peeped in periscopes, spoke to everyone. I can only recall his saying:

'Remember, Mottram, this line must be held at all costs!'

How much my precious report had to do with it I have never known, but certain it is that the same night, long after rations and battalion carrying and working parties were up, there suddenly appeared what seemed a whole field company of Sappers, with timber, wire, tools, and all sorts of things we had never had; solid platforms of wood were built in the half-dozen habitable bays, extra wire put out, the C.T. cleaned and strengthened. The enemy was unusually quiet while the whole place hummed like a builder's yard. And the very next day, the first in which we had been decently comfortable and capable of some effective resistance, we were relieved by the next battalion.

It took hours. Instead of relieving section by section, the newcomers (green, I suppose, as we had been) flocked into the narrow gangway, cursing when their packs stuck against the traverses, falling into pools of 'water,' demanding dug-outs, stoves, heaven knows what. It became extremely difficult to get my men out. Some were in a sort of coma and could hardly move their legs. When they grasped that they were being relieved, they slouched away, without passing on the word to the next bay. I had to scramble along the parados and pick them out by the lights of Boche flares

from among the moving forms in those dark gulleys, tripping over signal-wire, barbed wire, and the unnameable encumbrances of the spoil-pit. N.C.O.'s were undiscoverable or helpless. I do not know at what hour we finally passed battalion headquarters. I was with the rear platoon of the rear company, and no sooner did we get on to a hard road, full of shell-holes, by the reserve lines, than the condition of the men revealed itself. Their feet could not bear the contact with paving, their senses failed to warn them of unevenness and obstacles, they could not support their packs. By the time we reached the Canal bank and were out of bullet range, but under heavier shelling, I was driving along as best I could a crowd of limping, staggering figures, who, unless watched, were likely to drop rifles, packs, or themselves, in sheer abandonment. We were not making a mile an hour and I knew that our destination was four miles away at least. Some ancient military superstition made it necessary to form a proper battalion column on the Brielen road just behind the Canal. Here, about midnight, we mustered, and I sought the Major, at once (F. having gone on to prepare billets and left me the company), pointing out that I had at least two-score men who needed ambulances to move them. His reply was: 'I don't keep ambulances in my pocket!'

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to make the unfortunates march. How we covered that distance, on the pavé road, to Steinje Molen (Stone Mill) I cannot make out. Somewhere along the road I found a dressing station and dumped some of them there. Of the others, when at last we came in sight of the lantern that marked our camp (it seems incredible that such lights were allowed), some were still going with me on hands and

knees rather than put the soles of their feet to the ground, so swollen were they with wet and cold and continual standing. It was impossible to check casualties, and I rolled into the hut, where some wire stretched on poles, represented bed for company officers. I drank something and went to sleep. This ended my first turn in the trenches.

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I remember that I seemed to have slept less than two minutes before being roused by my servant with a mug of tea and the information that breakfast was ready. It sounded queer enough to waken me, and I staggered out of the hut in which we had slept, from which other officers were turning out. I could hardly see or walk, I was so sleepy, the five hours I had had having been as nothing against the arrears I wanted. But the sheer delight of being able to walk upright, without dodging along a sketchy trench and offering myself as a registering mark to the enemy, was so pleasantly novel as to keep me going in the direction of a smell coming from a larger hut under the trees. On the step I was met by the Major, who eyed me severely and remarked: 'You haven't shaved.' It was true, and comprehensive, indicating my general appearance, which was simply that of a company officer just out of the trenches. I suddenly realised that we were soldiers again, ran back, gave a hasty scrape to my face, took off my sand-bags, raincoat, equipment, and woolly cap, and reappeared. This time I was correct, apparently, and sat at a wooden trestle-table on a bench, and ate everything passed me. Not only was the food properly cooked and eaten in comfort, and, better still, in the exhilarating company of companions I had not seen for a week, but the day was drier and less cold, my clothes had dried in the night, and the spirits of all rose rapidly to the boisterous

with sheer reaction. The Major was good-humoured enough once a certain minimum tenue was adopted, and the only shadow on that unforgettable meal—beside the shadows cast by thin autumn sunshine coming through paling poplar leaves—was the Doctor's grumbled commentary on the sick parade. It seemed that it was bad for men to be wet above the waist for days together.

However, some two-thirds of the battalion were able to stand up, half an hour later, for arms inspection. After that, weapons and equipment were placed in racks, and we moved off, by platoons, to Poperinghe, to have baths in the brewery in the Grand' Place. A keen wind cleared the sky, and the vigorous motion was intoxicating. In the open fields between the Poperinghe-Ypres road, still tree-lined, and the Elverdinghe road that bounded the camp on the north, all the brigade reserves like ourselves of two divisions, and divisional and corps troops, were going through various routine jobs. To add to our good spirits, there was the heartening effect of numbers and efficient appearance. We no longer felt like a handful of sodden despondents, hoping to hold the line by the use of our rifles. Here were, besides seemingly thousands of other infantry, divisional artillery, even corps heavy guns, engineers with pontoons, a sort of Smithfield-cum-Covent-Garden by the new railhead, crowded with A.S.C., medical units and divisional cavalry. So one was part of an army, after all, not an abandoned waif! On one side was the cheerful rat-tat of a machine-gun range, and on the other a divisional band practising. We covered the four miles in record time, singing as we had not done since England, and carrying nothing more lethal than towels, soap and clean pants.

Poperinghe, a solidly-built, rather-more-than-village of horse-dealing proclivities, stood ample and welcoming beneath its three gigantic church towers. In the big brewery the men went into the vat, and the officers had individual mash tubs near by. Here I learned A.'s distaste for this sort of bath: he stood stark naked, pretty as a girl, bitterly complaining that I had made a mistake and led him back to the trenches: 'Same water,' he cried, pointing to the dark brown liquid streaming in the mash tub.

'Only hotter,' I ventured.

'Shows we're nearer Hell,' was his comment.

I don't know what we did after getting the men together—they wanted to go shopping or sight-seeing, of course—and marching back to camp. I strongly suspect that we ate all we could, and went to sleep. If my memory serves, we did the same at and after dinner. I fancy I was still serious enough, or still sufficiently aware of sounds coming to us from beyond Ypres, four miles away, sometimes making the roof of the hut rattle, to talk straight to E., the bombing officer, and C., who had the battalion machine-guns. Both assured me that things would be better next time. E. had actually got some 'Mills' grenades at last, had secured a practice pitch, and had been exercising his bombers until sternly ordered by the Major to take them further off. I'm afraid he argued, for he admitted that the next thing the Major said was: 'Do you understand the nature of an order?' C. was even more helpful, explaining that he wasn't going to play squirts with his guns in my nasty drain, as he characterised the section of line I had held. But proper machine-gun protection was to be organised, he said.

The following day parades were ordered, and shortly after lunch came orders for carrying and working

parties. I had to take a platoon to the petrol tanks at Ypres. I asked the Adjutant where they were. He took out a map and put his finger on a spot marked clearly enough, Ypres. As I knew what it would be like, that night, I asked for the map. It was his only one, so I couldn't have it. After tea, therefore, I set out to that town to which I had never been, to find a place I had never seen, in the dark. The men trailed behind cheerfully enough. It began to rain and the paths we followed to the Brielen road were simply a quagmire. But the greater difficulty was that practically the whole of Corps and sub-Corps artillery was packed along our route. Between the roar of big guns firing singly or in sections and of 18-pounders in salvoes from all the fields around, and the bursting of German shrapnel retaliation overhead, it was impossible to hear anything said, or to tell by sound if the men were keeping together. I had Sergeant H. at the rear, but he was as helpless as anyone else. This meant that at every shell-hole—and there were countless ones and more being made every minute—it was necessary to stop to let the rear come up. We were no longer soldiers as on the morning before, but a party of explorers, slouching under mackintosh sheets and with oozing extremities. Under these circumstances I suppose we were about four hours covering the four or five miles, and arrived at Ypres in the midst of a wonderful pyrotechnic effect. I now began to inquire of individuals and parties we met the direction of the petrol tanks we were destined for. Some said one thing, some another, some were truthful and professed ignorance. It was often as much as I could do to keep my party disentangled from others, from convoys of lorries and horse transport.

We must have walked over every inch of Ypres,

which, seen subsequently in daylight, is a small compact town. Finally, having visited the ramparts and applied to all the R.E.'s that could be found, including some who were playing the piano in the fastnesses of dug-outs such as I had never seen up to that time, we emerged by the Menin Gate, and came back upon the Canal by the Thourout road. Here, about midnight, I found the R.E. to whom we were supposed to report, but who, owing to some hitch, was not requiring our services. We were able, therefore, to turn our faces campwards and tramp back, through a lessening activity of the guns. There was not really much in this experience, save that it gave me my first idea of the utter inconsequence of infantry in modern warfare. In the front line one felt oneself to be of some use, but back, out of bullet range and amid the gun-pits (and the total weight of artillery was then a fraction of what it subsequently became) one saw clearly for the first time—and did not grasp what had happened—how this enormous steel plant could go on working against the other steel plant, over on Pilken ridge right along to Messines, without our interference, and only regarding us as a target. Herein lay the possibility, so fully exploited later, of always taking trenches at will, whenever sufficient artillery was focussed upon them. The prowess of individuals, of platoons, and battalions even, and subsequently anything up to a division, with its bombs and rifles and bayonets fixed, was grotesquely irrelevant. The infantry didn't matter. Such, however, was not then the opinion. I think we were only four nights in camp, and then paraded at dusk and marched to the railway near Vlamertinghe, and were taken up to Ypres by train. This was a novel and cheering experience. We thought the glassless compartments a great luxury, and

the bulk of the train a perfect protection. When shrapnel came through the roof and hurt no one, it was considered a great joke, to the horror of the R.T.O., who implored us not to make so much noise, lest the Boche hear us. This only made men who had been living within earshot of the enemy, laugh the more.

The company was this time in battalion reserve, and therefore held a 'keep', or fortified position, behind the reserve line and facing not only forward and to either flank, but at a pinch, rearward. It occupied the village of St. Jean, about two kilometres north-east of Ypres on the Thourout road, and straggled from the summit of the slight eminence that filled the north half of the Salient, some hundreds of yards down the west, or sheltered side of this. It was just within bullet range of the enemy, but as most of the buildings, except the church, were still standing, it afforded a good deal of cover from view and from weather. What seemed to us sand-bag shelters of immense strength had been constructed in the cellars of all the larger houses, while the then continuous double line of cottages made the street, at its western or lower end, a fairly safe dump to which horse transport came every night, while company headquarters, under the lee of a rockery in some old gentleman's garden, appeared to us nearly as commodious as the camp. On the northern side of the street was a good aid post. At the eastern or exposed end was a barrier of paving stones across the road, that would certainly stop a whizz-bang or field artillery shell. Through the gardens behind the houses on either side ran the flank trenches that also served to give access to C.T.'s that were supposed to connect with the front line. The whole place was thoroughly registered by machine-guns, but the protection seemed ample, and

we had learned the trick of listening and dodging those systematic visitations. What we did not realise was the rhythm of the war: how one side was perpetually inventing some defence that stalemated the opposing gunfire, and how the other side immediately took steps to find a way of penetrating that defence. We did not grasp, not being professional students of tactics, that in losing the surprise of the first few weeks, both sides lost the War. There remained a very different thing, the War of Attrition. It took a long while to learn that attrition was not merely a matter of decreasing manpower and materials, but something that affected the spirit.

That evening being dry and fine, with a magnificent moon, we all felt in good spirits. It is true that, after we crossed the Canal and divided into companies and were half-way up the fields to St. Jean, we were stopped by A Company coming clean across our route. Captain R., who commanded, asked me if I knew where we were, as his guides (runners sent by the battalion being relieved) had not turned up. I told him what little I knew and went on with D Company, F. being busy elsewhere. I had seen St. Jean twice for a few minutes, and was not at much of a loss in identifying it. There followed the distribution of the sections, and the telling-off of parties to carry rations forward as soon as these arrived at the dump. Then we listened to the tramp of the ——shires whom we relieved, 'going out,' platoon by platoon, with that timbre of footfall so ominously different from that of troops 'going in.'

Next came the rumble of limbers, the muffled hurried voices of transport men anxious to be quit of their burdens, turn, and set their willing beasts galloping back to their lines. This was always a moment at which

it was quite possible to lose a lot of men. The enemy could not fail to know what was going on. To begin with, he was doing the same thing himself, probably more efficiently. The noise of traffic on the broken pavé was audible for miles, the spot known by air photos as well as if it had been measured with a foot-rule. I took care to keep most of the parties back, until the first one or two were clean away. There remained Battalion H.Q. mess, machine-gunners, and such special details. When they were all gone I found the valuable Barr and Stroud rangefinder still lying in the mud where it had been thrown. I folded it up in my raincoat and carried it back to Company H.Q. dug-out, where it was carefully put away. I still cherished the idea that some day I should be allowed to use it.

The night passed off quietly, and by daylight, from our situation, we had the novelty of enjoying a view. From Company H.Q. looking west, or rearward, we had in the foreground the white bones of Ypres. It appeared to be all built of stone, but this may have been because the brick buildings would naturally go first, much of it still dignified and marked with that intriguing decay which, allowing for utterly different sentiment at the root of two opposed styles of architecture, makes the present Parthenon so much more appealing to the imagination than the completest theoretic reconstruction of it. At our feet the Canal ran northward, and beyond it were the fertile plain of the Yser, bounded by Elverdinghe woods in the north, the slight rise of the ground by Poperinghe in the west, while southward rose the gravelly ridges of Mont des Cats with its convent, Mont de Boeschepe with its windmills, and Mont Noir with its pine trees. Most of the farms were then still standing, Vlamertinghe, Brielen and

Dickebusch were intact barring a few roofs, and in the pale sunshine the whole made up into one of the landscapes of the Flemish School one had been brought up on. The one disturbing element, the railway, was deserted, thus helping the illusion. But nearer to us, of course, were incongruous traces of the strife we were engaged in, with its wholesale destruction and its extraordinary erections, or rather burrowings.

I think it was on the second night that, having seen all duties dismissed, rations distributed and the dump cleared, I was astonished to find more commotion than ever, Ypres-ward.

The keep was closed on this side by C.'s reserve machine-gun post and 'knife rests' (roughly, hurdles laced with barbed wire). These had been pulled aside, and I found artillery transport coming through. An officer commanded the party, and I told him I didn't want him up in our lines, bringing down a lot of unnecessary shelling. He replied: 'That's what you're here for!' and I think a truer word was never spoken. That, precisely, I was beginning to see, was the place of infantry. The gunners were supposed to have a gun hidden somewhere in St. Jean for the purpose of registering. I never discovered it, although I crawled over every inch of that rapidly collapsing village at one time or another. But the enemy had the same idea. The next night they started in to find that gun, and never was German character more clearly revealed to me. They employed a battery of 15-centimetre guns (five-point-nines) of which one section seemed to be behind Pilken and the other near Gheluvelt. They fired in turn rather more than once a minute, searching the entire place methodically yard by yard. At the same time their field artillery was directed upon the trenches forward. Soon

a trickle of walking wounded, followed by the more laborious stretcher parties, began to wind down the street. The bombardment was so regular that I cleared most of the men from the dug-outs on the top of the slope (east end of the village) and made them lie down in the fields adjoining; even so, the platoon near the barrier lost fifteen men immediately by the destruction of a big house. We got together a party, under the company-sergeant-major, to dig for them, but some of the bodies were, I believe, never found, and were probably victims of a direct hit. After this, I stood by the barrier turning the stretcher-bearers off the road. Fifty yards away on either flank they were in comparative safety, and could reach our aid post, and when, very soon, that was overcrowded, the larger dressing station near the Canal head. I had several near shaves and was frightened out of my wits, but managed to stick it. There were, at moments, interesting things to see. A fair-sized, brick-built shop and dwelling-house was struck by a shell, which appeared to land just inside the doorway. The building seemed to rise an inch or so, like a sponge filling with water, and then collapsed in a mere heap of ruin. One house began to burn, but water was not lacking, and we baled a C.T. on to it with waterproof sheets and buckets, and prevented it from being much of a mark. After about three hours the bombardment ceased, and I brought the men back to their stations. F. now came from his job at Battalion H.Q. and asked if I wanted to request our guns to retaliate. It seemed to me completely futile. They could shell the empty German trenches, no doubt, but I preferred to get the men rested and ready for whatever the morrow might bring.

It brought rain, and then, just before midday, as I was

going round suppressing fires that smoked too much, I was astonished to find myself confronted with four civilians in tweed suits and bowlers, following a red-tabbed G.S.O. I asked him who he was and what he was doing, and he replied that Corps ought to have told me that. I referred the party to F., who apparently had been warned that a deputation of munition-makers would be allowed to see round, to get some idea what the trenches were like, and go home to preach the gospel of work. St. Jean was not the trenches by a thousand yards, but it was within bullet-range, and I dare say they saw and heard enough. They were very quiet and kept together. Unfortunately the war was not at its liveliest that morning. It was no use pointing to a mess of bricks and burnt clothing and shards of all sorts and saying, 'Fifteen of my men were killed there last night.' Nor was it impressive to point to a small hole in the parapet and explain that it had been a dug-out for two, but that a whizz-bang had knocked the beam that supported its two feet of sand-bags through the chest of my best corporal. There was only the endless hiss and scream of machine-gun enfilading and ricochet, and occasional shrapnel bursts over the road. They may have complained of the waste, for S.A.A. lay all over the place, where it dropped from the men's equipment as they did their jobs. One of B.'s platoon put down a brazier on the floor of a dug-out, and was rewarded by five loud pops. A full clip had been lying there and ignited by the heat—harmlessly, of course. And where the C.T. called Garden Street joined the keep, a Lewis gunner had been hit and had dropped a box of unbelted and unclipped cartridges such as he required. The corner was a very dangerous one, any number of people were hit there, until eventually poor G. of C Company,

who had been given the job of 'O.C. Garden Street' with a special series of parties to mend-up that incipient drain, was killed there. I certainly did not encourage any of my men to pick the stuff up, even in the hope that it could have been cleaned and rendered fit for use. Or the same munitioneers may have caught sight of the abandoned gun positions on the bye-road that led from the west end of St. Jean Street to Potije Château. I don't know if these dated from before the reverse of April 15th, but there were smashed-up limbers and rings of cordite lying all over the place. What they did see was a set of grotesquely accoutred individuals, cooking food, smoking, reading or gossiping, a few doing odd jobs with wire or bags, such as could be done in daylight, and one or two, with rifles in their hands, peering out at various well-protected places enemy-ward. There was a good deal of noise and a comprehensive stink, and everything was wet. In any case, during the following years we did not lack munitions.

It was during this tour that we got another lesson. C., the machine-gunner, was a merry fellow. When A. and I occasionally treated each other to bits of 'One Gerrard,' or other fashionable vocal music, he would ask:

'Do you chaps always sing in your bath?'

'This isn't a bath, it's a trench!'

'What's the difference?' Or:

'Are you chaps Lollards?'

'What's a Lollard?'

'I don't know, but you sound as if you were it, defending its young!'

He could imitate animals, give burlesque renderings of regimental personalities, and even others. His 'Lord Kitchener on a Ration Party' was funnier than many a

'turn' I have paid to see, and his 'Mayor of Poperinghe getting Married' showed a real insight into national characteristics. But on this evening he was dull and depressed, and we only gradually got out of him that one of his section, in the reserve post by the church, while cleaning a rifle had put a bullet between his own toes. C., who liked his job and his men, swore that it was a real accident. Had it not been, it would have amounted to a crime: 'self-inflicted wound,' which, next to being found asleep or drunk on guard, or wandering without arms, was as grave a charge as anything up to thorough desertion. C., however, had bandaged the man, and it remained to get him a new pair of boots quietly from Q.M. stores. We might not go out for days yet, and even so, we were Brigade reserve and would be kept close to the Canal. The difficulty was solved by taking the right size of boots off a casualty, and I believe no one else knew of the incident.

Eventually we did go out, as F. had truly said, only a mile or so, to Machine-Gun Farm on the Ypres-Brielen road. It was a beautiful starlit night, and we got away without further casualties, which was lucky, considering our depleted numbers. The farm itself was a stout brick structure, about three hundred years old, consisting of a courtyard, enclosed by two-storey buildings of great solidity on three sides, and on the fourth by a large double gate which gave on to a cobbled entry, and thus led to a bridge over a deep wide moat that surrounded the whole. On the outer side of the bridge was a barbican tower of sorts. The place had long been evacuated and was shelled, but had resisted pretty well. Gunners had dug-outs of immense strength in the cellars; we slept under protection of the inch-thick pantiles. The following day was Sunday, and as

the weather had clouded over, we held morning service in the big barn. I can't say I liked it. It seemed a ghastly travesty. If the Germans could have seen us, they would certainly have shelled us. Had we caught them in such a mass, we should have done the same; not that either event would have materially altered the course of the War. I took my place and saw that the occasion was decorously observed. I supposed it was part of discipline, and one felt bound by one's duty as an officer. In the afternoon we censored an enormous sack of letters. It was not difficult, few officers in the infantry, not to mention other ranks, knew enough to say anything informative; but, once more, one obeyed orders. What else was there to do?

In the evening we paraded working parties and marched them up to the line we had held four weeks previously. I had one which was detailed to work on some badly shelled and flooded bit of reserve line, where our first battalion headquarters had been. The enemy had grown nervous again, or disliked our successors more than us (or, dare one hope that those successors' machine-gun and bombing retaliation was less effective?). Anyhow, they would not let the place alone. By some miracle—probably the difference caused by varying atmospheric pressure between registering in daytime and firing at night—we did not lose a man. But the laborious digging was knocked about, and I had to keep men strung out as thinly as possible (men like to get together to talk and there is mutual support and encouragement in it, not to mention the man-and-mate habit of skilled labour). Even so, I, the R.E. Corporal in charge, and some of the party were knocked off the bags into a filthy hole. However, at midnight I was able to fall in and march back a full complement.

Another diversion at Machine-Gun Farm was the Find-your-own-Route game. I suspect it had its origin in the fact that someone discovered that our men would take off their equipment to dig. There were orders and commotions about it, and I remember one indignant telephone message from Brigade: 'Do you know you are the only reserve troops we have within an hour's march? What would happen if we were surprised?' I said I didn't know. I regarded surprise as about as likely as sudden Peace, but didn't say so. However, orders were orders, and rather than have men crimed, we saw to it. Now, following on from this, here came the regulation that officers were to make themselves acquainted with the shortest route to the Canal bank. It was also part of the growing nervousness on our side as to a renewed gas attack.

Accordingly A. and I set off in the morning, and were joined by two platoon commanders from C Company. We found a route certainly, but I doubt that, even had we been able to memorise it and find it again in the dark, we could have got the men along it, encumbered as they were. The rich meadows were just now flooded, and this rendered them as slippery as ice. We ran into several gun positions, and were requested to go wide of them and not give them away to enemy observation and shelling. I did not reply: 'That's what you're here for!' We also discovered a cottage in which two aged and incredibly decrepit women were still living, partly, I think, because they had nowhere to go and no means of carrying their few belongings, partly from sheer lack of imagination and initiative, partly because they made what probably represented a fortune by selling coffee to neighbouring gunners. They sold some to us. Why they had not been evacuated by our own people, or the

civil authority, as the population of Vlamertinghe, miles to rearward, had, I can't think.

This, in fact, was the main impression of that walk. The Salient was, I believe, the first sector in which the continual 'strafe'—big black stuff was bursting over and around Ypres all the time—had made the war-zone proper, that is, the desert inhabited only by combatants, nearly ten miles wide. We wandered about Ypres for a bit—its extraordinary resistance to destruction struck a sort of awe into the most callous—and were viewed with great suspicion by the Town Major, a heroic soul who lived there and had frequently to be replaced by another like himself. However, our orders covered us.

We next went into the line on the higher ground near Potije Wood. Here the trenches for some hundreds of yards were dry and fairly well built, and no-man's-land was much narrower and interrupted by a belt of trees, in among the roots of which we kept a man lying out all day from before dawn until after dusk, to listen and look if he could. He never saw or heard anything worth while, but from his description I grew all the more certain that our enemies only patrolled their front line and did not live in it. And soon convincing evidence came. A knob or mound in the enemy's support line was discovered from an air photo, and our 9.2 guns were instructed to demolish it. Even F. admitted what the result would be, and putting all men except the necessary sentries under such cover as existed, he and I scrambled down into the morass in our right, due east of the wood, where our front line ceased entirely, having been heavily shelled and flooded, and thus relapsing into a 'cemetery' where poor decomposing bodies were lightly covered, or floated, offending even our trench-hardened noses. We could see very little, and before

many shots had been fired from our side, wop, wop, wop, came the retaliation right in our fire-bays. Nor was that all. We were apparently enfiladed from Hooge, and the men who tried to drag their wounded comrades out of burst-in dug-outs or from flattened parapet, were hit by bullets apparently descending perpendicularly behind our defences. F. and I were busy enough for half an hour or so, as it was impossible to evacuate wounded by daylight. Finally F. said he had had enough of it and wired for counter-retaliation. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. The whole field armament of the division was let loose on the German reserve line, and bodies, stakes, wire, sand-bags, fascines and concrete went hurtling up in the air to the height of twenty or thirty feet, about five hundred yards behind their front line, as near as we could tell. And this silenced them for the time. Why, I can't think, as in neither case were the guns the objective; but I suppose they were beginning then to nurse their infantry reserves for Verdun. And trench mentality cannot be better exemplified than by the fact that a decent member of the middle classes, such as I hope I am, actually enjoyed the spectacle.

I now began to learn the rhythm of the war in this sector. This sort of incident gingered up the artillery on both sides. Rationing and the evacuation of wounded became difficult. Nervousness increased certainly on the enemy's part, judging by the quantity of star-shells he used. It led up, sooner or later, to a minor operation on the one part or the other, and then quiet supervened; as no advantage was to be gained there, even by the gigantic effort of 1917, how much less, then, by our inter-battalion scrapping. We went out after four days this time, as the whole Brigade went back into Divi-

sional Rest. 'Pop,' or Poperinghe, to which we went, seemed like Heaven. We were billeted in a deserted convent. I have since tried to recapture the sensation of sleeping on the stone floor of a nun's cell, and waking in the morning to see the blue smoke of our cookers rise against the last gloriously russet leaves of a great chestnut tree in the garden. Once more we were soldiers; guards were set and parades ordered. Then there was the finding of a football field, and a good deal of eating and drinking. The first night there was neither whisky, wine nor beer (no Expeditionary Force canteen had been established), but someone procured a bottle of crême de Cacao and we drank that and water. Alcohol was a necessity, and we had long finished the ration rum.

The second night neither A. nor I had any parade, and went to the 'Follies,' a pierrot entertainment enlivened by two ladies in the caste. I believe that originally they were local girls, but their places were taken by male impersonators, and the names, Lanoline and Vaseline, with which they had been christened, gave way to Ack Emma and Pip Emma. I have heard 'The End of a Perfect Day' and 'Old Roger Rum' sung since that time without being able to account for the delight I then experienced, except that we were Divisional reserve and were liable, as many a Divisional reserve before and since, to be called out of the hall and pushed into the train for Ypres. The worst that happened on this occasion was that the tenor came on with his make-up half wiped off, and asked us to evacuate the building quickly and quietly, as the enemy were shelling the town and making the Town Major nervous. This caused pandemonium, as we did not think the reason sufficient, and the funny man took the opportunity to run from

the back of the hall shouting, 'Do you want to buy a dug-out?'

Graver work was on foot next morning, however, when we officers were all summoned to a château in the rue de Furnes, to attend an officers' conference, I forget on what subject. But in the middle of it I was taken aside by the Colonel and told to report at Brigade Headquarters, rue de Proven, to take up the duties of Intelligence Officer. This gave rise to the usual witticisms, but I hastily 'poshed up', removed my Webb equipment, put on a Sam Browne belt, and a new cap and the riding breeches C. unkindly said belonged to the Underground Artillery.

I found the Brigadier and Brigade Major in a substantially furnished living-room of a house in the rue de Proven, was asked some questions and given my orders, which were to start next day with the Brigade Machine-Gun Officer to take over the sector into which the Brigade was shortly going. My companion K. and I accordingly set off the following day in the G.S. wagon that carried valises, and arrived at the Canal bank, but not the Canal bank that I knew. It was a stretch of the embankment nearer Ypres, and contained several fine dug-outs, in which it was possible to stand upright, and which were lined with canvas and provided with wooden bedsteads with 'mattresses' of fencing-wire. Several beautiful old chairs diversified the S.A.A. boxes on which I was accustomed to sit. Thus the General and the Brigade Major (sharing with the Staff Captain) had a dug-out each, K. and I another, while a fourth was at once mess and office. In the thickness of the embankment a tunnel had been cut, giving access to the water-side, and in this the signallers worked and slept. Brigade Signals Officer had a small dug-out of the more usual kind near it.

The thing which I found so exciting was the large map, or, rather, set of maps, on the mess-office wall. Few infantrymen of that period had seen anything like it. There was the whole front (a much shorter affair than it subsequently became) with trenches marked, gun positions shown, areas of Corps, Divisions, and Brigades outlined, and the allotments of artillery and other support to first line troops indicated. I learned for the first time the size and weight of the guns supporting the very sectors I had held, and noted the many recent alterations and additions that had been made since the early 'offensives' when the entire ammunition supply had been shot away and the batteries rationed. There was even then, in the light of subsequent ideas upon the subject, the puniest armament of divisional and corps medium and heavy guns, while the concentrated weight of 'Army Troops' artillery that was massed for the later offensives was not indicated at all. I don't suppose it then existed. As regards the trenches shown, some existed in theory and had never been dug at all, some had been shelled flat, some flooded and fallen in, some had suffered a mixture of the last two fates. That much I could correct straight away. The more comprehensive side of the job, I saw, was to get to know the other units of the Brigade, each of which was to be provided with a battalion Intelligence Officer, with a corporal and section. I should have to 'do' for my own battalion as well as carrying on the Brigade duties. I got a line inserted in Brigade Orders, calling for a return of names, etc., for this organisation, and went to 'bed' directly after mess, as it was no good trying to do anything while the whole sector was swarming with fatigues and parties. I knew that this would be quiet by midnight or a little after, arranged accordingly and

went to my 'kip.' It was dark, of course, and I was used to undressing without a candle, but discovered by sound that K. was already in 'bed.' I had missed him at mess, but assumed he had had to make an early start on his round. I made some remark and the reply was a groan. I then took my torch to look at him, and eventually got the admission that he was ill. It seems an anti-climax now, but those who did not know him and were not of our particular set, cannot imagine how deeply he felt the disgrace of being sick in the line. Against his wishes, and because of his extreme weakness, I got a doctor, who soon diagnosed appendicitis. How on earth he stood the jolting journey in the wagon I cannot think. The sequel is that after going home and being operated on, he went to the mounted M.G.C. and was killed in Palestine, the natural fate of a better man and braver soldier than ever I was.

I still reckoned on four hours' sleep, but had hardly gone off before trench-instinct made me sit up and reach for my boots. At first it was only a great increase in rifle and M.G. fire, but suddenly the whole divisional artillery let loose salvo after salvo, and on the top of that the heavies joined in. Before they had fired twice I was in the office, where the Brigade Major was already at the telephone. He had the greatest possible difficulty in making himself heard in the din, but apparently located the trouble in the sector that had been held by my battalion on their first tour. He told me to get to divisional reserve and have them 'standing-to' in readiness, but by the time I was back from Signals the danger, such as it may have been, was over. It was a magnificent demonstration of that most important axiom of modern warfare: 'Never obey orders. They are already superseded.' The rule was that infantry units

were not to communicate direct with gunners. The proper procedure was for the sub-command to inform battalion headquarters, these to request Brigade for artillery support, Brigade to speak to the appropriate gunner authority. Then, I knew quite well, would have followed the usual interchange: 'Have they advanced from their trenches?' 'How do you know?' 'On what front?' etc., and by the time some small detachment of wretched infantry in a water-logged gully had been massacred, some decision would have been taken. As it was, it appeared that a bright platoon commander in the ——shires, finding himself confronted by a big raid or bombing party of the enemy, signalled S.O.S. so violently that a sleepy signaller at battalion Signals had scared Brigade Signals into putting it straight through to the artillery. The result was that the attackers were immediately and effectively caught. Rifle and M.G. fire must have found many of them in the open, their trenches received the fire of our eighteen-pounders, while dug-outs, gun-pits, dumps and tramways, of which they had many—anything, in fact, that could be spotted by air photo—had the benefit of 4.7, 6 inch, and 9.2. The response was feeble and desultory, a few big shells bursting along the embankment of the Canal or among the gun positions. This seems to mark a sort of turning-point in the shift of initiative that was the characteristic of the transition from 1915 to 1916, the beginning of giving as good as we got, which, for some time to come, camouflaged for many an infantryman the fact that he went west in any case. I also caught a faint glimpse of the glory of war, and why the more secure persons are willing to wage it. From the safety of the embankment the sight was magnificent. The Brigade front was lit to a tawny red by the incessant

discharges, shells flickered all over the ridges held by the enemy, and there was a majestic sonority in the deep-throated clangour of the guns behind. I did think of my battalion subjected to just such treatment, in the reverse direction, a week or two before. Anti-climax soon supervened. Nothing happened. Some scores of casualties, but the end no nearer save by the effluxion of time.

The next day was gloriously fine, and the banks of the Canal shone with the pale gold of the poplars. The cover they afforded was, however, deceptive, as I found when I took a number of N.C.O.'s to the western side to give them instruction in reading the compass and taking bearings. Wherever we went, whatever we did, large bursts of shrapnel followed us, so that eventually it was impossible to teach anything. Nor could I discover whether we were seen from Boesinghe or from beyond the Menin road. We had to be content with such training as could be carried out under cover. In the afternoon I saw the Colonel of my battalion appear at Brigade H.Q., and was soon sent for. It seemed that B. had gone to an appointment at G.H.Q. in the new Camouflage Department. He had some special knowledge, I forget what it was, of the work. I had seen the circular, but it meant nothing to me. His definite seconding from the battalion left F. with only one subordinate in the company. The Colonel wanted me back, so there was nothing for it but to hand over the job, such as it was, to one of the other battalion Intelligence officers. Nor was it possible to discover which was the most use, or to recommend him if one had so discovered. The appointment had to be governed by the arrival of reinforcements which would permit of a C.O. releasing an officer for the duty. As a matter of fact, I only went

to the other side of the Canal, and to superintending working parties. I was lucky, for shortly afterwards the entire squad was wiped out.

Occasionally I went across the bridge to Mess with Brigade by invitation. The General preferred having his in his bunk, but the Staff Captain, C., who had come from my battalion to do Brigade machine-guns, the Signals Officer, and the new Intelligence Officer formed a cheery crowd, in that reasonably safe and fairly dry spot. C. insisted that there were oysters in the Canal, and when we defied him to produce them, said he was short of bait. As there did not appear to be much use in indenting for this, Intelligence suggested cutting up the Padre, very small, and throwing him in. Nor should it be for one moment supposed that this was said out of disrespect to this officer or his cloth. Had he not been a thoroughly good and brave chap, and emphatically one of us, his name would not have been taken so lightly.

What strikes me, however, in looking back at the Brigade Mess of that date, was the useful comparison which it forms with the later organisation of the War. The formation of (nominally) four thousand officers and men was self-contained and practically stationary. True, it had no jurisdiction over other arms or services, but it retained its allotment of Divisional Cyclists, with scarlet shoulder-straps, controlled its own Signals, as well as the activities above mentioned. It remained in the same Division, Corps and Army, and in practice went in and out of the same trenches. It was not until the Somme that my battalion changed neighbours. Not that one got to know other units in the Brigade. The trench warfare of the period was carried on by small detached units, companies split into platoons and

parties, who seldom saw their own battalion headquarters, not to mention others.

These duties took us further south, nearer the Menin road. The trenches here were drier and better built, and had need to be, in view of rifle, grenade and Minenwerfer bombardment which they received, owing to the narrower no-man's-land. On the other hand, M.G. and rifle fire were practically ineffective, and one moved with more ease than in the shoulder-high breastworks of the northern part of the Salient.

Here I begin to lose the thread of these memories. I kept no diary, and can only say that while the impressions of the first few weeks are fairly consecutive, there begins at the point I have now reached, an increasing blur in the images I have retained. It was partly that the various incidents that succeeded were no longer novel but were mere repetitions of previous occurrences, partly the fact that I was trying to do two jobs at once, and partly that about this time—though why then and not before, I don't know—that the M.O. coming into the dug-out that served for Company H.Q. to make some arrangement, instead of giving me the usual greeting, took my wrist in one hand and with the other stuck a thermometer into my mouth. I think C. was there. I remember someone saying that I really preferred the old-fashioned tobacco. The M.O. said nothing to me, but I may have been thick in the head. I certainly disliked the dug-out, which was on a level with the Yperlé stream that ran behind and lower than the Canal, so much so that I did not sleep even during the short periods when I was not on duty, but watched the roof of the place, under the impression that there were rats in it, which was nothing surprising, as one of B.'s last experiences before he left us was to find one

asleep on his feet. At another time I got the idea that the top was slowly sinking in on us. This again would not have been wonderful, but it struck me, for some reason, as additionally horrid by the light of the candle that we had to keep burning in case of some sudden call.

I am clearer about the next time I saw the M.O. The Brigade Intelligence Officer and I had occasion to go in broad daylight from St. Jean by means of the ordinary road ditch, for the road here, on the eastern side of the St. Jean undulation, was in plain sight of the enemy, from Hooge, for a couple of miles. Our idea was to take over an old O.P. the artillery had abandoned. It lay half-way down the slope, between our support and front line, and consisted in a tiny thatched summer-house (in a little road-side garden belonging to some *rentier*) of which the bottom had been knocked away, and the conical top had settled down intact between some thick bushes. Among the roots of these a hole had been dug and we could squat in there and survey miles of wet upheaval, stakes and wire reflected in oozy pools, rotting sand-bags and blasted trees. I don't know what we expected to see, but we didn't see it. There was absolutely no movement behind the masses of German wire, and although it was interesting to observe our shell-bursts over the fold after fold of vaguely upturned earth, it became evident to me then that nothing of the nature of the bombardment of which we were capable would lay that labyrinth open to capture. I suppose we corrected the maps as far as possible, but what I remember best is seeing our doctor walking calmly down the middle of the road we had just avoided. I shouted to him to get into the ditch, but he replied that he must go to A Company in the fire-bays, where some badly

wounded needed him. He passed on out of sight, and why he was never hit I can't imagine. The whole place skipped with bullets, and shrapnel was continuous, though, I thought, too high. He wasn't hit. I saw him later, in his dressing station, about some of our casualties. But that simple walk of his was a far braver thing than most historic heroics, and would undoubtedly, in any other war, have won him the V.C. I have seen pictures of men gaining that rare decoration by doing exactly what he did.

It must have been about this time that all units in the sector were engaged in digging the Great Drain. It had been borne in on the consciousness of highly-placed people that it was useless for units to continue to pump or canalise the same lot of water from their own bit of trench to their neighbours', and a comprehensive scheme was set on foot to put the lot into the Canal. It was scientifically planned by R.E.'s and we all worked at it. It was, of course, soon spotted by the enemy, who mistook it for some recondite effort towards an offensive movement, and shelled it with big stuff. Thus, in the intermittent dark, trying to see where my party were flinging their shovelfuls of pea-soup-like 'earth,' I found myself involved in an upheaval like the last day. It took me—seconds, I suppose—but apparently minutes, to move first one limb and then the other, and find that the left side of me was jammed in a wooden A-frame that had been closed up round me, like a pair of tongs. The terror of the moment, however, was its absolute loneliness. While trying to wrench myself free, the next flare went up, and although I was in the midst of a large army, there was not a soul in sight. I had a passing impression of being the last left alive in the whole Salient. This passed rapidly, of course, and I

shouted for the N.C.O. to get the men together and go on digging, especially as it was obvious that many of the party must have been buried. It seemed a long while before I heard an answering hail, and the party began to collect. Some had been flung many yards and appeared dazed. Some had simply taken the nearest cover. I forget how many casualties there were. It took me several minutes to get free, and eventually an injury materialised that troubled me for years.

Another feature of the period was the stimulus given to the policy of raids. Those of us who had been there all the autumn knew what that meant, but we were addressed by the General on the subject, and there came to us an officer in semi-naval uniform, with some new and curious dodges for wire-cutting. These were large clockwork devices, like dumb-waiters designed by Heath Robinson, with a charge of gun-cotton, detonated by a trigger that was intended to catch on the enemy's wire as the machine ticked across the ground. After some abortive attempts to follow this up with raiding parties, this officer and a hundred of the Royals, next to us, disappeared altogether. I don't know if it was ever discovered what happened to them, but the raiding policy was less prominent after that, and company commanders were forbidden to take part. Raiders were promised artillery protection, of course, but as gunners subsequently explained to me, it was very difficult to be sure, with the variations of temperature and density, whether these night-barrages would do what was intended.

Yet from time to time we did make prisoners. I remember C Company being very proud of two Germans who walked, unarmed, into their lines. This enabled us to know what units were opposite us, and

might have justified the raids even, had they not been so costly.

At that time I felt little bad result from being buried in the Great Drain, but the incident had a curious consequence. Just before it I had been sent to get pay for the company from the Field Cashier at Proven. Then we were suddenly sent up for the extra digging on the drain, and before we could pay out, I was buried. When we got back to the Canal bank, my clothes were in tatters and the notes—a thousand francs, I think—missing. This necessitated a Court of Inquiry in a dug-out, and I was solemnly asked to produce the tunic and show the state of it. I replied that I had sent it to be mended. I don't know whether this went against me, but I never heard any more of the occurrence. I didn't much care, being by this time queer in the head. Soon after this F. gave me a chit and told me to report to the M.O. at Essex Farm. I can't say I connected the affair with myself particularly, but when I got to that shelled skeleton of a house, a doctor asked me some questions, took my temperature and put me on an ambulance. I lay that night on a stretcher on the stone floor of Trois Tours Château, I think. The C.O. took a good deal of interest in my wrists, which were very swollen from the rubbing of wet sleeves, but which looked funny, I suppose. Also I was in a filthy state, made worse by having had to tear up my sponge to clean my pistol. I was left alone, with an officer who had several M.G. bullets through the thick of the leg, and another who was stuck fast with rheumatism (I think), so that when they lifted him he came up all in one piece as though he had no joints. He could speak, though, while the other was collapsed. I wanted to know, I remember, what the noise was. I could distinguish the regular sounds of the

front, but between those and me was another roaring, rattling sound, and I could not make out if it were outside me or inside my head. He assured me that it was outside on the road, and was made by tractors taking up a new eight-inch battery, the first of this calibre I recollect. For some reason this seemed to exonerate me from worrying, and I next remember hospital train, casualty clearing station, and finally Base Hospital at Boulogne. Once I was washed and fed and had rested in bed for a few nights, I soon threw off any symptoms I showed, and should speedily have been released for duty, but there were just then, I believe, the first paratyphoid and tetanus scares. Anyhow, they took some blood from my arm and analysed it. I suppose it passed the test, for, after a short convalescence in a French 'home' on the coast, I was discharged and returned to Depôt. The main impression left on my mind is the extreme efficiency of the medical service. I saw casualties of all sorts brought into that Base Hospital, and the other medical units through which I arrived at it. In the initial stages, dressing station, aid post and clearing station, casualties frequently arrived looking like lumps of mud more than human beings. But they were washed and dealt with so that in a few hours they were sitting up and talking to one. Hospitals (like everything else) were then more general and less specialised than they subsequently became, for I remember all round me officers, and in the next ward other ranks, down with every variety of gunshot wound, one case of pneumonia, one boy who had twenty odd pieces of shrapnel in him: they were always taking him off to the operating theatre, no light task as there was no lift in the building. He seemed to groan and cry all the time until he died. There were also gas cases, an officer with a nervous

affection of the heart, and a case of delirium tremens, though how this last had managed to get enough stuff to bring about such a result has always been a mystery. He must have been employed at base or somewhere out of range. It was difficult enough in the parts where I had been to get any quantity of strong drink sufficient to disguise the chlorine in the water. I remember his wild talk about a negro and a black retriever dog that sat on his bed, suddenly ceasing as the orderly ushered in a lady dressed in most beautiful furs, who had apparently been hurriedly summoned from England. She stood perfectly silent, looking at him, until with one shriek he buried his head beneath the bedclothes. I never knew what happened to him.

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When I next saw the battalion it was in Poperinghe, preparing to go into the line. The whole Brigade had been out to rest, reinforcements had come up, the depleted platoons were made up to strength, the battalion Mess was full of strangers. Among them was J., who came from the Honourable Artillery Company. He had a great tale of how his celebrated battalion arrived at Westoutre in 1914 and was brigaded with the old First Division. In an estaminet two members of the renowned regiment were discussing whether they had paid their subscriptions. A private of the ——shires overheard and shouted: 'Hi, mates, here's a bloke in the *H*onourable b——y Artillery what's been and *paid* to come to this b——y country!' (Loud and prolonged cheers.)

On the whole the impression was favourable. Among the original 'K' enlistments had been men of all ages and conditions, who had joined from excellent motives, but had, in the enthusiasm of early days, not been

sufficiently sorted out. The reinforcements were much more uniform in physique and age, and among the new officers we felt the benefit of the now innumerable promotions from the ranks. There were none, I think, who had no previous trench experience. One of the first people I met was the Major. He shook me by the hand. 'Good-bye, Mottram, I'm going home!' It came as a great shock. The removal of that figure with the South African and other ribbons, years of experience, and soldierly bearing, made one feel so exposed. I don't know if he had any personal reasons, but I believe that this was the time at which the order appeared that battalion commanders were not to be over forty-five years of age, and seconds-in-command were limited to forty-two. He survived the War, but died at what seemed to me an early age for so robust a man, and I think his life was shortened by the horrid changes that had overtaken warfare, rendering the 'soldier' that he had been, and the 'fighting' he was prepared to do, completely obsolete.

Among the 'other ranks' the matter was simpler. The R.S.M. and the Police Sergeant simply walked into the orderly room, very correctly dressed, and presented their papers, showing them time-expired. After this, I doubt if there were a dozen regular soldiers left in the battalion.

We marched up, and I think that was the last time I (and possibly anyone else) ever saw a battalion in column set off from its billets and retain its formation until well through the artillery positions. We must have been obvious enough to enemy aircraft, but were not molested, and as we broke up into smaller and smaller parties, and took over the line from our predecessors, I began to have definitely what I can only call the

nineteen-sixteen feeling. The machine-gun and artillery fire against us was certainly not so sustained or deadly as it had been. This may well be the case, as the enemy were concentrating every available unit before Verdun, and may have actually depleted the forces opposing us, and were therefore anxious to be left alone as much as possible. Or the German command may about this time have renounced the Salient as a bad job. Certainly our people were in better heart, far more heavily armed as regards artillery, particularly in the medium calibres of howitzers. (When I say this, I am not relying on figures, which are not in my possession, but merely recording the personal sensations of an infantry officer, who, holding the same trenches at intervals for months, now began to feel much better supported.) But there was a new spirit of organisation abroad. It showed itself in the smallest detail of routine. The relief of the outgoing battalion was carried out, as I have said, piecemeal. I actually got my two platoons into their designated trench next Potije Wood with only two casualties. Mills grenades were now plentiful, and we received about this time our first issue of steel shrapnel helmets and box respirators. I think there were twenty of each for the battalion, and they went, of course, to stretcher-bearers and bombers. And yet further the new spirit became manifest. The machine-gunners were now hardly part of the battalion, but worked almost entirely from Brigade; and there was already being formed an entirely new arm—the Trench Mortar. It is true that we had had experiments previously with small brass engines which we disliked, because, while not a match for the Minenwerfer of the enemy, they were sufficiently cumbrous and noisy to attract those most painstaking and nervous men, the German gunners, and while our

infantry derived but little protection from these early forms of mortar, they caused the whole position for hundreds of yards to be plastered with shells. We were therefore most favourably impressed by the Stokes mortar, a device like a gigantic pencil-holder, a cylinder, closed at one end, on the interior of which was a spike. The cartridge was allowed to slide in from the mouth, or open end, until the gun-cotton charge at its base was detonated by the spike, the shell being thrown high in the air and, falling flat in or upon the enemy works, bounced a few feet and exploded, giving a far-reaching shrapnel effect. The weapon was mounted on a simple tripod, was easily handled, offered no mark; owing to the high angle of fire, the ground took the recoil, if any, and the discharge of the loosely-fitting shell gave a pop rather than a bang, and being directed upwards, must have been very hard for the enemy to locate. Numbers of men had volunteered for this arm, or for the 'toffee-apple' and other varieties of mortar, and there also appeared orders for a roll of men willing to transfer to 'heavy M.G. Corps' and other specialities, the very names of which meant nothing. In fact, it was being recognised that the infantryman with his rifle and bayonet, and even with grenades, was little else than that which the enemy had always described him as, fodder for cannon.

Another welcome change was the new flood of supplies, especially those relating to the incessant building necessitated by trench warfare. The most important were the new frame dug-outs. Instead of shallow pent-houses of sand-bags that fell down if they were not blown flat, we had now wooden frames roughly six by three by two feet high, which formed a solid basis on which sand-bags could be piled, with some chance of

their staying. Then we had a fresh and efficient equipment of Vermorel sprayers (machines like blight eradicators, which squirted a compound that neutralised the chlorine gas), fans, and other devices. The trenches were better sited. It had, apparently, been decided to abandon the bit of front trench that ran north-east of Potije Wood, which was blown flat and flooded, to replace it with a new trench that lay in a tiny but sufficient fold in the land north of and through the wood itself. It must have been very well concealed naturally, and it is difficult now to believe that most of the trees in the wood, a spinney of approximately five hundred yards in each direction, were still standing. Anyhow, I remember that, at the north-west corner of the wood, there was an angle of brick wall with the frame-work, even some of the glass powdering down on the mummified grapes of a vinery, and, most surprising of all, a summer-house of 'rustic work,' perhaps twenty feet high, stood erect. It is true that a 5.9 had gone clean through the trunk of it, but an artillery observer was secreted under the thatch, and his signallers in the brick basement. I made friends with him at once, and was allowed to crawl up into his nest, keeping flat against the wall, pore over his maps and have a squint through his glass at the masses of German wire.

It was a very fine vantage point. From it could be seen the whole field that had been fought over so intensely in the second battle of Ypres. I had read of the exploits of those half-dozen divisions that had been annihilated in establishing the very line of which I now held a bit, after the first gas attack. Even in the short space of time the conditions had changed almost out of recognition. Right up to the end of June 1915 the defence of the Salient, frequently broken, had been

conducted by counter-attacks carried out by hurriedly-summoned reinforcements of a battalion or less, here or there. Detailed accounts of what happened were even then to hand, and having read these, and looking at the very spots named in them, I marvelled at the alteration that had come about in so short a time. The now well-known incidents of field-guns brought up to fire at a range of two hundred yards, of generals walking up to uncut wire, ordering the attackers to lie down, and then (presumably) walking back to the signallers and calling for further artillery preparation, had already become almost incredible, as were the British offensives at Neuve Chapelle or Richebourg, with their puny resources and easy mark afforded by the German mass formation then in use. The difference was twofold, physical and moral. As to the first, the landscape had completely changed. Then, natural cover, trees and hedges, buildings and embankments were all standing, but the artificial obstacles, regular connected trench-lines, always three, and sometimes many more times deep, did not exist. This links up with the change in 'moral' or human outlook. The men of the dozen divisions of the second battle of Ypres were all heroes, not merely in effort but in the atmosphere through which they moved. They were mostly killed before they had time to discover how cold and wet and futile the War was. In fact, their war wasn't. Their trenches were too few and shallow to form a gigantic waterworks draining the whole countryside.

It mattered extremely, in those days, what a single platoon (or not infrequently a squadron of dismounted cavalry) did. Survivors to whom I have talked were quite unconscious of the tremendous fate that hung upon the use of their individual rifles, often do not

seem to have known what was happening, and even to-day could not find the spot to which they were rushed, in the nick of time, never having seen it on the map.

I caught but a glimpse of that period of the combat, in the early weeks of my time. But, virtually, Loos ended, and Verdun and the Somme put clean out of sight that phase of the War. The gallantries of those early days would have been criminal lunacy a year later. By the end of 1915 it was possible to lose a whole platoon in raiding the German trenches, or even in doing nothing whatever, without affecting the War in the slightest, except to slow-up, very temporarily, our initiative. Before I had been long in front of Ypres, field-guns did not move by daylight within five miles, not to mention two hundred yards, of their targets. We had acquired and used gas, and were even making a respectable competition in grenade and machine-gun and trench-mortar tactics. Generals no longer walked up to the wire. But it is impossible to divide the War strictly into periods. The situation was even stranger than that. In between and contemporary with those early battlefields, from below the southern limit of the Salient, by 'Plugstreet,' all round the town of Armentières to Laventie, lay an extraordinary sector where the line did not budge for over three years. I do not mean that men were not being killed there all the time, or that the usual precautions were not necessary in clear weather, but the situation there was so extraordinary that I must deal with it separately.

And lest I have made some mistake about the trend of the War, I have looked up Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Campaign in France and Flanders*. I find that, writing in early 1917 about the events of 1915, he says, speaking

of '——, an artillery attack,' 'Such an attack probably represents the fixed type of the future, where the guns will make an area of country impossible for human life and the function of the infantry will simply be to move forward afterwards and to occupy. . . . It was not a contest between men and men, but rather between men and metal, in which our battalions were faced by a deserted and motionless landscape, from which came the ceaseless downpour of shells. . . .'

Such is the almost prophetic conclusion (strengthened, no doubt, by observation of the Somme battle) of an experienced and weighty writer whose knowledge goes back to the Boer War. His words describe better than any I shall ever find, a change that began to daunt the soldier of 1916. The men of 1915 laid down their lives to hold some place of which they did not know the name. A year later, their successors knew the sector all too well. It was the place where the line had twice been pushed back a couple of miles, and where, in order to maintain the trenches in which we British were besieged, over half the battalion, including all their friends and fellow-enlistments, had been lost. Thus, queer as it may sound, I believe men welcomed the chance they got in the gas attack of December 1915, or the effort a month or so later on a narrow front to regain a trench which, if I remember, was called 'Willow Walk' and was, in my humble opinion, anyhow untenable. These little-known affairs of which I or anyone else saw little or nothing, did give an opportunity to the rank and file of shooting at something, though not, I think, at mass formations. The former disclosed the inefficacy of the calico P.H. helmet, for there were many gas casualties, and whole companies were vomiting and helpless. That may have been the last time wave gas was used.

It might have been as serious in its consequences as the battle of the previous April, on almost identical ground, had not the breeze shifted to the disadvantage of the Germans at the crucial moment. The other affair cost many valuable lives, and produced a negligible result.

It is a pity that the painters of battle pictures cannot paint one of that typical minor offensive. The men crouching under a sloppy parapet, while for twenty-four hours great masses of metal were flung over their heads against the objective. Then the 'charge'—the slow and difficult crawl forward to find the enemy trench, that had been so carefully blown to pieces that it could not be identified; the attempt to make some sort of cover, and the inevitable counter-bombardment that wiped out the attackers, until a few famished scarecrows crawled back with the news to their starting-point. Officially, of course, soldiers never retire except by express order; frequently, however, in a modern battle any sort of order fails to reach them. It is not only that all soldiers, except a few inverted eccentrics, are afraid. They are. One of the few worthy traits of soldiering is the conquest, not the avoidance of Fear. I remember, in the middle of one of these affairs, conducting a relief, and finding young X. of B Company going somewhere or other with a party. The kid (he was eighteen, I think) was sobbing, and as we passed in the C.T. he grabbed my arm, crying: 'Oh, Mottram, isn't it awful!' I told my sergeant to carry on, and walked a few yards with him, to point out how necessary it was that he should control himself before the men. The Colonel sent him home, but eventually he came out again and did well, I heard.

Coupled, then, with better organisation and equipment, the first rumours of the preparations for the

Somme provided a very strong stimulus to the imagination. We were on the Canal bank when they first reached us, watching the slow demolition of Nordhof Farm. The big solid old place, companion to Machine-Gun Farm, had withstood the new methods of war for a twelvemonth, but apparently the Germans now had made up their minds to destroy it. Corps Artillery, whose H.Q. had billeted there, had, I believe, already moved away, for by this time, except infantry reserves of small formations and guns in action, no one lived east of Vlamertinghe. The enemy artillery took all day, using (necessarily) very big howitzers. The row was regular and incessant, great columns of white dust from the plaster, and pink dust from the brickwork, rising high in the air. We had to put police on to prevent our men hunting for nose-caps when they ought to have been asleep, preparing for the night's digging. Even so, we got a remarkable collection, some 'noses' being constructed of what appeared to be the material of which telegraph insulators are made, on a metal frame, a fact on which we founded a good many theories. The evidences of preparation on our own side were even more pronounced. The personnel of the battalion was changing rapidly. Officers and men were constantly volunteering for balloons or flying, machine-gun corps, or trench mortars.

All that was comprehensible and reasonable enough, although I and others had strong sentiments about sticking to the battalion. But about this time came queerer and queerer circulars, demanding the most extraordinary qualifications—all sorts of engineers, draughtsmen and mechanics went to special branches, and then there was a call for officers speaking Portuguese that we mistrusted, as it was taken to mean joining

the East African Expeditionary Force, instead of which it was an endeavour to provide Liaison Officers for the Portuguese Army that joined us and was wiped out at Laventie in 1918; and another for those speaking French, coupled with some other ability which I have forgotten. I went down on this last list, under the impression that we were going into the Somme next to, or overlapping the French, and would require to be able to keep touch with them. Bolder spirits said it was because we were going right through, this time, into untouched country where the civil population had never seen British troops, and that I should get a sort of 'advance party' job for the brigade. I didn't mind which it was, there was a sort of etiquette still in the battalion that made us volunteer for anything that looked like being useful. The 'wangle' had not yet descended to us.

We next went into the new G.H.Q. trench that had been dug in the rear of the Potije position, to compensate, I suppose, for the obliterated bit of the front line. I don't know who gave the line that name, the only reason I discovered was the straightness of it, which made C. say that some chap at Montreuil had seen a map by accident and drawn a line on it. But the siting had a curious effect; the Germans, of course, found it in a photograph and took a dislike to it and shelled the portion next the Thourout road to bits. But further south their usually exact fire seemed to go just over the top by a few yards, so that one was safe close under the parapet, while the latrines were dangerous. Thus, at night, one had to climb on to the parapet and walk along it, as it was the only bit of firm foothold across what was otherwise a morass in which wading was deep and the depth of mud below unplumbed. This was partly owing to the nature of the soil, which made the

top of the St. Jean undulation hold water that would have run away a few yards down the slope on either side. However, by management, my command had relatively few casualties there, and these were mainly wounds in the lower part of the body, owing to the exposed means of access. These were difficult to handle, being much more noisy and convulsive than men hit in the head just over the sand-bags. One thing I remember well, and that is, that after the regular carrying parties were gone and the spell of digging and revetting finished (for we now had a fair supply of timber, and regular workshops had been installed far back by Division R.E.'s), my last job was to go round before the shovels were gathered in and see that every scrap of new work, wood or bags, was liberally plastered with liquid mud from the trench bottom or rear. Anyone who has studied the sharp definition that contrasts in colour will give in a good air photo, will realise why. Anyhow, it was a fairly lucky tour for us, and C.'s regular machine-gun work every night seemed to do something to make the enemy keep his head down. This was as well, for we still had only wooden pickets, not the corkscrew iron of the Germans, and the noise made by working-parties in support lines was almost impossible to suppress, as it could be suppressed in the front line. Yet the showers of sparks from bullets striking on the wire that the men were using, and the constant searching with shrapnel, were certainly less frequent than they had been.

On one of these nights, Captain R., who had been promoted Major, came round 'visiting' in place of the Colonel. I was taking my turn off, in a cucumber-frame dug-out, and he crawled in beside me and we had a long discussion over a sketch-map I had made of the sector,

and the possibility and advisability of trying to drain and rebuild the useless portion of the support line. The thing that sticks in my mind, though, is the way his sentences trailed off, as if he were thinking of something else and was just going to tell me what it was. I waited sometimes for a perceptible interval, hoping that he would tell me what was on his mind, not only from 'manners' to a superior officer, but because I liked and respected him. He never got it out, however, and I have wondered since if he knew he was going to be killed. It didn't take much arithmetic to calculate what the chances of survival of any of us were, officers of the battalion averaging about six weeks' life, I think, at that time. But it seemed to me that it was rather a premonition than any logical view of his case that made him fall so silent. He had just over three months to live, and I never saw him again, except on parade.

For my luck just then asserted itself. I forget what trivial job I was doing in that yellow-and-black half-light, when a runner came to summon me to Company Headquarters. I left my sergeant in charge and walked along the top of the parapet to the Company Headquarters dug-out. F. told me to report to Divisional Headquarters in Poperinghe and C. stood me a drink. I never saw either of them again. F. was killed, of course, and C. wounded and sent elsewhere. I then walked to the Canal and had the luck to find some belated Brigade transport. I bagged the sergeant's horse, telling him he would find it tied up to the post outside the bath-house brewery in the Square at 'Pop,' this being as much as I knew about the location of Divisional Headquarters. It was an interesting ride. I had never done anything like it without a body of men to look after, and with leisure to observe. The Spring

night was not too cold, with a few stars, and all round was that extraordinary rumour of horse, foot and mechanical transport parties getting back to their camps and dossing down for the few hours left. At my back was the flicker, rumble and rattle of the endless trench warfare, all about me a double intermittent stream of traffic, walking stolidly up or hurrying and fidgeting down the road, and turning off to its myriad destinations. The animals splashed and grunted, the tractors and lorries vibrated and belched, the men were just in that state at which they smoked or sang fitfully and decreasingly, and went on, asleep, on foot or a-saddle. 'Pop' was dark, shuttered and still, but a shaded light faintly showed the door of the Mairie, and a policeman assured me that Headquarters were still there. I found Q. office and reported.

Here I had better explain that the structure of the Headquarters of a Division was then still what it had been in the early days of the War. A Major-General commanded and was attended by two aides-de-camp, of whom the senior was Camp Commandant. Under the General the work was divided, so that 'operations' or fighting was the business of three General Staff Officers known as G.S.O. 1, 2 and 3, or the 'G' side, while the discipline and maintenance of the troops known as 'Q' side fell to the Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General, Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General, and Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General. In addition to these 'soldiers,' all of whom must necessarily have been combatant officers, there was already provision for an Assistant Provost Marshal, and for Assistant Directors of Medical Services (with a Deputy), of Veterinary Services and of Ordnance Services. The Commanders of the Artillery,

A.S.C., and Engineers did not live with and rank as part of Divisional Headquarters, so that, although I did not know it, I was, with the exception of French and Belgian Liaison Officers, the first additional attachment to a body almost entirely of regular soldiers, commanding, in proper grades of delegation, a division still largely composed of regular troops. Only the D.A.A.Q.M.G. and D.A.D.O.S. were territorial enlistments.

With a mind perfectly blank, I knocked on the door of the Salle des Mariages of the Mairie of 'Pop,' which had a large Q on a placard, and entering, completely blinded by the lamplight, came to attention in front of a table, at which was seated the A.A.Q.M.G., a colonel by rank, an officer of Indian experience by his ribbons. I gave my name and regiment, and he gave me a good stare. I kept perfectly still, as neither I nor F. had the faintest idea why I had been ordered to report. The only thing I could think of was that the affair of the Court of Inquiry on the Company pay I had lost when buried, months before, had cropped up. But instead of placing me under arrest, he hunted among the papers on his table, and said:

'You say you can speak French?'

'Yes, sir!'

'Are you sure?'

'Yessir!'

'Look at the stuff on that table!' and as I went he added: 'It's a horrible business!'

The table in the corner was covered with a mass of papers, prominent among which were blue forms printed in French, backed up by *procès-verbal*, letters from very humble, and a few from very important personages, in Flemish or French. It amounted, in brief, to claims for compensation for depredations of the

British Army in the Divisional Sector, drawn up under the French billeting law of 1877 and the corresponding Belgian enactments. It was an astounding mass of information on the habits of a population, the actual impact of modern War, and a satiric commentary on the superficial battle history of the previous year. It amused me, among other things, making me think of that incident in *Charles O'Malley* when the Iron Duke lectures the troops on the iniquity of plundering, and the cockerel in the Quarter-master's pocket crows after the third denial. And there was the imminent chance that I might find some necessitous foray of my own set down as '*dégâts occasionnés par les troupes britanniques.*' But the Colonel was waiting:

'Can you make it out?'

'Yes, sir, I think so!'

'Then you'd better take it completely off my hands.'

'Yes, sir. Now?'

'You can begin in the morning!'

That was all I wanted. I took off my equipment, lay down with my head on my pack, and was half asleep, when he came back to say:

'You'll mess in "B" Mess!' He was not used to junior officers going to sleep on the floor of his office, I expect, but didn't know what to do with me.

I thanked him, and knew nothing more until the signallers changed over in the morning. I fancy the Colonel was more astonished than I was when I saw him next. I got to our transport lines, dug out my valise, shaved, and put on a 'Sam Browne' belt, and found 'B' Mess in time for breakfast. Although 'Q' office did not work all night, they stuck close to their job, and at nine o'clock the General came down from his room to sign papers, and this constituted a sort of

parade. I was brought before him. I think the Colonel had already forgotten who I was, and in any case was entirely unused to the New Armies. The General asked me my name and regiment and looked even more astonished than the Colonel. He let a moment pass and then asked: 'Yours is a Temporary Commission?' The thing in his mind, I afterwards discovered, was the fact that I was wearing the badges of the very regiment from which he had risen, and never having met me in India or Africa, he was wondering who I could be. This was now explained, and he next asked, as the Colonel had, whether I understood the nature of the 'horrible job' I had taken on, and if I thought I could do it. I never found out why their relations with the civil population impressed these officers as horrible; they were both a little inclined to think of the inhabitants of Flanders as 'natives,' and as the two languages spoken there conveyed nothing to either of them (except a few words—fewer than they knew of various Indian tongues) they had fallen, I sometimes thought, into that spy-scare state of mind which, never at its worst among actual soldiers, was one of the darkest spots of War mentality. They had just this much justification, that the portion of Belgium retained by us was essentially Flemish, and contained a certain proportion of people who, without being disaffected, had perfectly legitimate, if mistaken, opinions as to the greater advantages to be expected for their 'Flemish nationalism' from siding with the Germans. Some hint of this atmosphere may have found its way into the minds of these officers, and they were probably nervous, as to the extent of the demoralisation, after its considerable disasters at Liège and Antwerp, of the Belgian army which nominally protected our left flank, but was itself protected by inundations.

Apart from this attitude, I am glad to say I have nothing but kindness and courtesy to record of those under whom I served while attached to Divisional H.Q. The General, of course, I did not often have occasion to see, and the Colonel was glad to get rid of the 'horrible job,' and others like it, as it turned out in the course of time. With the officers who composed 'B' Mess the contact was different. They were the G.S.O. 3, the D.A.Q.M.G., A.P.M., A.D.V.S., A.D.M.S. and D.A. Signals. All of them were regular soldiers, the army was their profession, their life, especially as most of them had been in India together and in France since Mons. The War was their one chance, and they had not admitted, up to that time, that it was the wrong sort of war. Their homes were in the southern counties of England, or in Ireland, their conversation usually confined to horses, dogs and birds. I must have seemed an interloper, a bank clerk, already looking middle-aged, and feeling small, as indeed my 5 ft. 9½ and eleven stone naturally did in what was almost a family, a party of personal friends, all standing six feet in their socks. They worked hard at their jobs all day, and the G.S.O. 3 slept under the telephone at Headquarters every night. In the Mess they were most interesting when they could be got to talk about the early days of the campaign. I wanted to know at what point the open warfare had ceased and under what conditions. They could tell very little. To begin with, it was not in their tradition to talk about their exploits; then the story was that of the loss of nearly all their friends, of a whole class of society in which they had lived all their lives and certainly expected to die; and I also suspect that in those early weeks, when most of those to whom I talked had been regimental officers, they had known

and seen very little beyond their immediate vicinity. I did, however, get some idea of Le Câteau from one of the Departmental Heads of a Service. He stared into the fire and spoke to this effect:

'We were told we were in touch with the enemy, and I went forward with C squadron to make arrangements. The ——shires were lying down behind a railway embankment, and my friend, J. C., had his guns in a field behind 'em. As I passed he called out: "Going to shoot over flat sights. Chance I've been waiting for all my life!" In another minute he and his guns were all flying up in the air. The other side of the embankment was simply black with Germans, you couldn't see the ground for them. I saw one of our chaps run his lance through the first of them that got over the embankment, then—'

Here I butted in:

'Could you see if he cleared his lance in time to use it again?'

'I did not. I turned my horse round and shoved him down the pavé road for all I was worth. I should crime anyone I saw riding like that now!'

This sort of vignette was all I could get. Even more characteristic was the incident related by the G.S.O. 3, of the third day of the Mons retreat, when his servant asked him: 'I suppose we shall catch them up again soon, sir?' He was under the impression that the — Dragoons were pursuing the Germans.

The food in the Mess was extraordinarily good, forwarded by some big firm in London at regular intervals. It was far more elaborate than the diet I was accustomed to at home, and after the rations I had lived on in the line, it seemed like manna from Heaven. I shall never forget receiving from home, on my first day in the Mess, a tin of shortbread, which represented to

me the height of luxury as well as family affection and all I longed to return to. Trench-fashion, I offered it to the Mess President, to go into the common stock. It would have caused a festival in D Company H.Q. dug-out. I remember that he put up his monocle, surveyed my humble contribution, and replied:

'Oh, I don't think so, thanks. Eat it yourself!'

He only charged me twenty francs a week, and he and the others must have made up the balance out of their bills. Nor could I very well thank them as I should have liked to have done, for I could never have afforded to live as they did. I don't know what allowances they made for the other non-regular members of the Mess. These were, at that time, the French liaison officer, Comte de G., and the similar Belgian appointment, Baron de V. Both of these were younger than I, both had brought their own horses and cars, and were, in their different way, as charming as the British officers among whom I found myself. I had naturally a good deal to do with both of these, and came to have a great respect for them. The situation of the Belgian Baron was particularly difficult. The only part of Belgium held by the Allies was the tiny triangle Furnes-Neuve-Eglise-Dunkerque; the only inhabited town was Poperinghe; the seat of the Government, an oasis of villadom at La Panne. In this 'country' the foreign soldiers certainly outnumbered the inhabitants, and it is not difficult now to imagine what must have been the feelings of de V——, a man of small stature but sturdy physique, great intelligence and very nice manners. Originally appointed in order to facilitate co-operation between British and Belgian troops, he had been, as it were, side-tracked, by the stabilisation of trench warfare, and merely represented the Belgian point of view

with our formation, and commanded the Belgian interpreters attached to various units. He spoke French and English, both admirably, and was a barrister by profession. How far his title indicated ancient blood or territorial influence I could form no idea, but I liked him, and in all those affairs in which he, so to speak, stood for Belgian and I for British interests, I found him business-like and tactful. Comte de G., a junior branch of a famous house, was a great contrast. If de V. was chiefly a lawyer and scholar, de G. was a 'lad,' and, as events showed, a hero. He was a handsome Basque, whose favourite sport was bear-hunting in the Pyrenees, and many a tale could he tell of weeks spent in the high valleys, with a goat-skin of wine and a loaf the size of a tombstone, carried by his gillie. He smoked a pipe and drank whisky in the Mess, but I could never make out whether he shared those British tastes, or only thought he ought to. On the other hand, he certainly could and did write and publish poetry. Sport and good living were, however, his principal preoccupations. I enjoyed journeys made with him into France, which was our back area. He knew when and where and what to eat and drink as well as any man I ever met. His business method, however, was non-existent. Like de V., with military liaison at a standstill, he was supposed to represent French interests. I soon found out, however, that I could get much more quickly and surely to the hearts of those big, gaunt, Flemish-speaking farmers and officials by treating them as I might, under parallel circumstances, have treated the clerk of some Norfolk Parish Council, than by adopting his ways. I remember riding with him, for instance, to Houtkerque, to investigate the alleged theft and consumption by gunners of one of our brigades of a barrel of stout. We started

early and splashed along the irretrievably ruined roads through a landscape of Hobbema, but Hobbema framed so as to form the back of a shower bath. We lost twenty minutes getting our horses past a light railway. Then a great humpty-shouldered church appeared above the elms, for all the world like Hingham, Norfolk, and we found the Mairie (over an estaminet, of course) and pushed through a crowd of villagers trying to get their sons exempted from conscription, and their places on the list of applicants for artificial manure unfairly promoted. In a tiny office, waist deep in official papers of all descriptions, sat an old man in a Dutch cap, smoking a clay pipe.

De G., glorious in strawberry and blue, shouted: '*Monsieur le Maire, nous sommes venus tirer au clair cette sombre histoire!*' The old man looked puzzled. I insisted on seeing the broken door or window through which the barrel had been removed. Then, with the help of some English and some Flemish (the Maire spoke rather less French than I did), we did 'drag to light this sordid story,' while de G. ordered lunch. The barrel was there. You could see it and test its emptiness. Nor was there much need. I sympathised thoroughly with the gunners, and was able to reconstruct the crime in which, alas, I had failed to participate. When the Brigade, numbering, I suppose, five hundred men, even after months of hammering, had watered and fed and set guards, they all made for the place, demanding drink. The old man had started laboriously filling glasses and mugs while those lasted, and then billycans, and no doubt was soon stumped for change. Of course he got shoved aside and the men simply filled every receptacle they had about them until the barrel was empty. Some paid, he admitted, but the claim was for

the difference between the amount received and the value of the contents of the barrel, and may have been two hundred francs. After adjusting this valuation to reality, I settled the claim by the present of a ton or so of manure. By that time de G. had procured a chicken done to his liking, a salad, hare pâté, jam and gingerbread, and a bottle of label-less but excellent red wine, and honour and everything else was satisfied. In fact, whatever de G. did and wherever he went, some of his ways I disliked, many I failed completely to understand, but he threw an air of romantic glamour over them, cocked his kepi on one side, talked polo at the top of his voice, and generally kept the War on a level to which it was never lifted, in my experience, by anyone else. I remember his bringing a claim by a certain innkeeper, who kept an estaminet on the Paris road near Aire-sur-la-Lys. There he stood in my 'office' (a tiny converted ground-floor bedroom to which I had moved when Q. became overcrowded), eyes and teeth sparkling, spurs jingling, braid shining. I was up to the neck in getting out some 'all-clear' returns for a billeting area and couldn't be bothered. I pointed out that it would take all day. His voice went up half an octave:

'My good Mottram, where is your sense of duty? Here is a claim which must be investigated. Otherwise I shall send it to my chief at Army Headquarters as a case of plundering. Besides, don't you see what it is—the historic inn, where Athos was besieged in the cellar—until he drank it dry!'

I hadn't thought of, much less read, *The Three Musketeers* for years. All that sword-and-doublet business seemed remote enough from the War of shelled latrines, parade-states, and de-lousing stations that I knew. De G., however, was quite capable of sending

the horrid bunch of official forms and semi-literate complaint to his chief and causing no end of trouble, and I myself was sick and tired of cramping my back over statistics and glad enough to get a job in the open air. When he added that he had borrowed me a horse and ordered lunch in Hazebrouck, I only stipulated that we should be back by dinner, so that I could clear up my papers that night, and off we went. I don't think that without his company I should have seen much romance in the crazy old pub. where some of our men, months before, had (or, to be exact, stood accused of having) failed to pay for eggs or chickens or both. I think this was the occasion on which I insisted on knowing why the depredation was foisted on to my division, and the tenant of the place produced a piece of sacking on which the letters O. A. T. S. were stencilled in the best government stores manner.

'*Voilà, mon officier, le nom de l'unité des britanniques.*'

Even de G. had to laugh. I did not try to explain that no 'unit of the British' had O. A. T. S. for a name. There was no doubt, on inspection of the back premises, that fowls had gone; the immense improbability of the farmer-innkeeper having sold so excellent a source of revenue led to inquiries, and I think I got him to settle for ten francs.

* * * * *

I have been led into these digressions, which anticipate events that filled a later period, by genuine liking and respect for those among whom my lot was now cast for a time. I must go back to the morning on which, clean and properly dressed, and feeling more thankful for my escape from the murderous boredom and uselessness of trench life than it is now possible to picture, I took the mass of papers that had so weighed on the

A.A. and Q.M.G. and got to grips with it. Before I had digested and sorted into convenient piles, according to areas, the cases for investigation, there came the news that the whole division was going out into Corps reserve. After six months we were actually going to be relieved. The Guards were coming in and we were going right back into France, H.Q. remaining just north of Cassel, and the battered units in billets stretching away, some of them, as far as Calais; so I had to hurry. Far from finding the job 'horrible,' it was, at last, something on which the mind could bite. It involved making oneself acquainted with the past and present history of the War, the movements of troops, the nature and conditions of local life, and the evolution of warfare during the first eighteen months. Luckily I was at home with French and Belgian currency and language.

The whole history of the matter appeared to be this. British troops had never fought on a friendly and densely populated soil. Not only African and Indian wars, but even the Crimean and the Peninsular, offered no parallel. Consequently there were no regulations, except such as were borrowed from our Allies, on which to base any policy as to the relations between our troops and the 'natives.' During the retreat from Mons all traces of British occupation disappeared. On the Marne and Aisne, it was early recognised that the perishable nature of the Entente would not survive the utterly new condition of things—the presence of an enormous army (the original Expeditionary Force was bigger than Wellington's or Raglan's armies) amid a modern civil state. The British came to deliver Belgium, but down in the centre of France the inhabitants looked askance at the trampled lands and houses that were

hastily converted into barracks. The strong sense of property that is a French characteristic had already expressed itself in a law of 1877, under which any damage done by the annual manœuvres of the French Army was legislated for. Naturally, in peace time, troops do not camp or bivouac except on waste land, and if they use public or private buildings and services, it is but for a few weeks. The War brushed all this aside. Apart from the scarcity of waste land in most of the districts over which the armies fought, other considerations became paramount. Troops had to be at certain places for reasons that had nothing to do with convenience, and the War soon outlasted the proper period of manœuvres. No doubt officers and men meant well, but arriving from the battlefield in buildings from which the women, at least, had fled or been removed, the decent amenities of the home naturally vanished beneath their muddy boots and hasty meals. They moved on, in the morning, and the returning inhabitants found with dismay the state to which their homes had been reduced, and were even obliged to note the disappearance of certain articles as a result of the co-operation of their allies. Even in the initial weeks, the matter became so urgent that an A.S.C. Captain whom I subsequently knew in a far more exalted rank, and a sergeant, were deputed to follow the track of the army, investigating and settling all such matters, guided by the French Law alluded to and the visible facts of the case, and obtaining receipts for the small sums paid out. The matter was bounded by wilful damage or theft on the one hand, which were matters of discipline and might even fall within the province of the A.P.M., and, on the other, by '*Fait de Guerre*,' damage done by the enemy during his passage through the country, or by his

shelling and bombing, or by any strictly military necessity such as flooding or destruction of objects likely to afford him ranging marks. This sounds a sufficient limitation to the legitimate claim, and so no doubt it was, since for the first months of the War the claims for compensation that were admitted as a reasonable public charge were settled by one officer and one N.C.O. for a trifling sum. But very different developments followed the stabilisation of trench warfare in October 1914. A permanent military population more than filled up the depletion of inhabitants caused by conscription and evacuation over a large area of France, and all surviving Belgium. The nearest parallel I can think of is reached by trying to imagine two or three million Frenchmen, of whom perhaps one per cent. could speak English, living for four years in the counties of Cheshire, Lancashire and Cumberland, in order to repel an Icelandic invasion of Scotland. It was not that the British civilian-turned-soldier was a thief or detrimental. It was that modern civilised life cannot be squared with ancient war. The British, individually, were pathetically domesticated. How often have I not seen twenty or thirty of them packed into some little Flemish kitchen, treating the peasant women with elaborate Sunday-school politeness, doing odd jobs, generally giving rather than bartering their rations or presents from home in exchange for small favours, playing with the children or domestic animals, tittering slightly at anything not quite nice, and singing, not so often the vulgar music-hall numbers, as the more sentimental 'Christmas successes' from the pantomimes, 'The Roses Round the Door,' 'All the Little Pansy Faces,' as well as their own compositions, 'Mademoiselle of Armentières,' 'And the Same to You.' The more ribald entertainments, and the

only sinister sign of those times, a song called 'Have You Seen the Corporal, I Know Where He Is!' were relegated to estaminets proper, though even in this matter it must be remembered that there were no sharp dividing lines. Every billet tended as time went on to become as much an estaminet as possible, to stick up its notice (written by the C.Q.M.'s clerk in consideration of an extra drink of coffee or beer) 'Eggs, Fish, Chips, Tea, Stout.' Mainly it was the regular beer-houses that heard anything at all lubricious or violent, though often there, again, the one girl of the place could be seen revolving or cake-walking in the most sedate manner with figure after khaki figure, to the notes of a decrepit musical-box or fatigued gramophone. Venereal disease did not trouble us much in those forward areas. There was no opportunity as in the big bases and depôts. In a word, the enormous British Army in France or Flanders must have been by far the most docile and decent disposition of troops ever made, just as it was the largest. Yet this did nothing to prevent constant and widespread damage. You cannot quarter troops by the million in a civilised population at a total cost of a few centimes per head per day. Things will wear up, smash, disappear. Outside, the case was worse. Where the farm was in Belgium, and held on the proprietary system common in England, substantial landlords had sometimes built good brick buildings floored with concrete. Otherwise, and increasingly as we spread south, the flimsy structures of peasant proprietors, mostly of timber centuries old, filled in with wattle and daub, fell down in all directions before the kicking of mules, the banging of doors, the hasty running-in by tired men of limbers or stores. Nor was it possible to make men take other than the most direct line from the

corner allotted to their section, across to the cookers, latrines or extemporised parade ground. Hedges were gapped, paths appeared through crops, gates were missing, pumps and drains succumbed to the impossible demands made on them. In the back areas, unknown to me at that time, was going on the most gigantic expropriation of some of the most tenacious people on earth. Camps and dumps, manœuvre areas and aerodromes rapidly multiplying in number as well as size, were demanding square miles of the very ground the British troops had come to rescue or to defend. Had it been for a fortnight, or even a season, the inhabitants of those countries might have paid their useless rent, or even sacrificed the unexhausted manures, or foregone the profit of shop or warehouse. But when it came to years, their temper soured, and they had, in France at least, a solid legal foundation for complaint. Thus, even early in 1915, it had been necessary to found a Commission, sitting at Boulogne, under the presidency of a cavalry general, Morrison, who was subsequently killed while carrying out his duties, to deal with the totally novel situations that arose out of this unheard-of war. And among the first things I discovered on the table at Q. office was a book of instructions issued by this body, for the guidance of harassed divisional staffs, on whom the entire administration in detail of the original Expeditionary Force depended, and of which I was now a member.

The fate of such divisional staffs may be imagined. They had already had eighteen months of unparalleled strain—that is to say, as much as the Crimean or Franco-Prussian Wars in length, and infinitely more in intensity. And just at this point, all sorts of new authorities were being created over their heads—while

they were still the standard formation asked to furnish reports, returns, and the circulation and enforcement of the, by then, bulky daily orders from G.H.Q. Small wonder that I heard the A.A.Q.M.G. declare in desperation, during my first week:

'The General wants me to go round the camps. Now, how can I?'

Indeed, looking at the deskful before him, how could he? This accounts for my presence in Q. office, and for the fact that, a gunner officer who had previously been attached to Q. in my unnamed and unforeseen capacity of 'extra housemaid,' having already been called up to the Commission aforesaid, the uninvestigated claims of nearly twelve months lay stacked on the table of which I now took charge. This again could not have occurred later in the War, but the then stationary divisions were landed with everything that happened within their sector.

The first papers I sorted out were those relating to the Belgian battlefield, practically contained in the Salient. It was urgent to get these settled before we went out, and leave a clean slate behind. A year after, I or another would have side-tracked the awkward-looking mass of papers by some 'passed-to-you-please' that became the habit of later stages of the War. In those days of early '16, however, one still did one's job to the best of one's ability, and borrowing horses, still officially allotted, two to each Q. appointment, whose holders could by no possibility find time to ride them, or cadging lifts in cars, or simply jumping lorries, I set to work to disentangle what I soon found to be the whole back-door history of the Second Battle of Ypres.

For no history can ever be written of the events of

April and May 1915 so graphic as that I discovered in the stilted phrases of the *procès-verbal*, and the illiterate, or in some cases lengthy and formal complaints, in that batch of claims for compensation. Indeed, they could hardly be so called, and stand distinct from most of the material I subsequently handled, partly on account of the nature of the battle, one of the last for a long period in which the element of surprise, although abortive, played a part; and partly from the fact that, being largely from Belgian nationals, they lacked the threat, veiled, if always in reserve, that lay behind French claims—of questions asked in the Chamber, and pressure brought to bear from very exalted quarters.

I knew, from older soldiers in the division, that Ypres, although shelled, had not been evacuated at the time of the battle. Restaurants flourished there, and certain civil amenities. Yet of Ypres there was not a word. The silence was eloquent. The actual evidence came from the village of Vlamertinghe, roughly halfway between Ypres and 'Pop,' its Château, and neighbouring one called 'Goldfish' and 'Trois Tours,' and the surrounding farms. I had no difficulty in reconstructing the scene—for I had already had the experience of a sudden, but not prolonged bombardment of 'Pop,' with the usual panic, the rush of the considerable population, carrying whatever they could lay hands on, out on to the surrounding roads, the scores of casualties in billets, the request from an elderly woman, dragging two children by the hands, to know, 'Monsieur, est-ce bombarde soon finish?'

At Ypres it must have come as suddenly and more completely, and no one ever got back to assess losses, which, in fact, were obliterated by shell-fire and became '*Faits de Guerre.*' A mile or two back the situation was

far more complicated. The villagers of Vlamertinghe (and there were some decent residential houses, besides substantial trading establishments) fled. The cavalry division rushed up to support the broken line, probably found (as I have since) the doors open, food cooking, fowls in the yard and beds unmade. They thought themselves in clover. Directly the situation was stabilised, the cavalry went back, and there must have been an indeterminate period, before official evacuation by the Gendarmes, when the owners and occupiers were able to take stock of events that had taken place in their absence. I more than suspect that their feelings were aggravated by the fact that the place was, for a short time at least, Lord French's headquarters, with its messes and other opportunities for profitable trading, by which thrifty people could recoup themselves for the interruption, if not the total destruction, of their means of livelihood. Some of them had already come there as refugees from Ypres, or even, originally, beyond. Here then was a typical incident of the War behind the scenes. The civilians had suffered sufficiently, and common sense, apart from sentiment and our public professions, bade us protect the Allies we did not want to lose. On the other hand, it was fortunately impossible to get any evidence to crime men who had subsequently mostly been killed, anywhere between Langemark and Hooge. True, various thefts and misuses were attributed to 'the British cavalry,' or, more definitely, to 'the Hussars' or 'the Lancers.' But I knew that to a civilian writing long afterwards, in a very natural state of mind, 'Hussar' was a khaki trooper without a lance, and 'Lancer' the same, with one. Then came the depredations of '*Les Noirs*', which meant indifferently French Moroccan troops who had fled before the unknown gas

that they believed to be magic, and the Indian regiments of our own divisions. These details must all have been supplied by hearsay, and one could only hope that the food, cooked or clucking, the bedclothes, buckets, ladders and other domestic objects that are the soldier's dearest and most comprehensible desire, contributed something to the defence of the Salient. I could only go over the ground, verify ownership and location as far as possible, and pack the whole off to the Commission with a report. The owners had long gone to Calais, Nice or Cheltenham, and what subsequent settlement may have been made with them I do not know. Only one thing was certain—that no further or more exact information could be obtained. I only just completed this investigation before the division went out.

* * * * *

How beautiful those back areas seemed, in the Spring weather, after nearly six months of the Salient. The little old villages were unsmashed, the fields smooth with cultivation and teeming with crops. Or one might see the flax being soaked, and dried and teased out on a wooden wheel worked by a treadle; while, in the square of the village, where Divisional Headquarters now filled the houses conscription and flight had emptied, Church festivals caused gay processions of children and village dignitaries. Along the unspoiled by-roads the very rare flocks of sheep pastured, or old women fed (by hand) a rabbit and a goat. One could eat and sleep, and ride the horses that wanted exercise; I remember with delight the black mare belonging to the D.A.Q.M.G., who had no time to ride her. A perfect lady, she seemed to me much more intelligent than most of the humans who had involved her in such a state of affairs. I do hope she was not horribly maimed. One

of the best things about the British Army was the insistence on sport. It exercised the limbs, distracted the mind and offered an alternative to the various, if primitive, temptations of the place. But it meant treating with the local farmer for the use of suitable pastures and open spaces, and it was incredibly difficult to make most of them understand the reason. Why should they give up profitable land for a diversion known to them as 'le fool-ball'? De V., de G. and I combined our persuasions. There were regimental contests, Brigade boxing and other tournaments, and finally a divisional horse-show, a great occasion, social and otherwise.

Nothing except the hardening of War could have made the thin veil of a few miles' distance, a few weeks' respite, seem so heaven-sent. For as we laughed and grew fat, there rumbled ever eastward the eternal bombardment and fusillade, and the horrors of Verdun unrolled daily those enormous casualty lists. De G. was on edge. His Gallic gaiety became more and more spasmodic. He disliked his Flemish-speaking compatriots.

'Can we be in France?' he asked me one day, surveying an excellent 1 in 20,000 map of the area, across which we had to go to console a village curé, whose '*route processionnelle*' around his church had been stamped and swamped away by the mules of the D.A.C.: 'Look at these names—'Nordpeene, Bolleseele, Merkeghem, Valkerinchove!'

I did not point out that these were, geographically and racially, Flemish villages that France held by right of conquest.

On another occasion de V. was vaunting the proud traditions of Belgian arms and claiming Charlemagne as his military ancestor. But de G. would not have it:

'*Charlemagne, c'était tout simplement un boche!*'

At other times he was himself again, introducing me to his commander, the Army chief of the French Mission, assuring me that this officer was 'a person of quite good family,' though what recommendation that could be to an East Anglian bank clerk he did not suggest. Or again, seeing a handsome charger rubbing noses with the butcher's mare, in the pasture behind the village, he found a poetic parallel:

'One might think a young prince and a village maiden!'

The real shadow of the War, however, lay across us from another angle. I first saw it when, one night, the stirrup-jawed A.P.M. sat before his untasted dinner. Two deserters belonging to one of our battalions had been brought in, and he had the shooting of them. The sentence was carried out at dawn next day, but there was no means of preventing a large civilian audience from gathering. This function was, I believe, later removed to higher formations, not without necessity. It is difficult to get volunteers to shoot their like in cold blood, and everyone sympathised with the desire to get out.

Far more general was the continual change in organisation. The Administrative Chiefs now came back to Headquarters, and the Mess was subdivided. Laundry and Salvage, Sanitation and Gas Officers were being appointed, and soon the non-regular, untabbed personnel of the staff outnumbered the brass hats as per establishment. Expeditionary Force canteens made their appearance, and there was a tendency to specialise hospitals, create remount depôts, innumerable 'schools' and baths. This kept me so busy, for there was hardly a yard of ground or a barn that the inhabitants were willing to part with, that the short rest-period soon

passed. Nor was this wonderful. I ask myself what I should have thought if, coming home on leave, I had found my house full of French troops from the Pyrenees and my garden arranged for a bull-fight. Yet such would have been exact parallels to the demands we made.

It must have been about this time that I got some leave. Six days was then the allowance, and how strange were the sensations of finding oneself at Boulogne, with its considerable civil population, restaurants and clubs open, and Channel steamers, but for the stream of khaki, plying with apparent regularity. How barbarian, savage, remote, War was! Something of the haunted isolation of the curse of Cain seemed to tinge the most righteous defence. One did not have to look far, however, to recapture the war atmosphere. Hospital ships and the mercantile marine of half the world, all now armed against submarines, crowded out the fishing fleet. The Bassin Loubet had been transmogrified by a set of enormous cranes, and the quiet quays by the most gigantic store depôts I ever expect to see. The crossing was uneventful, destroyers circling round the steamer, submerged in a flurry of white foam.

Then came Folkestone and London, and friendly faces, for the War had not yet bored or broken every heart. Of my own dearly-loved home I would not speak if a picture of the War could be made complete without it, for a home was the essential background of the new army. We were no stoics, unpropertied, voteless devotees of the real military tradition. My father was dead, my mother, nearing seventy, was struggling with a mass of voluntary work in a spirit of courage that brought tears to my eyes. After the first gladness, the inevitable end hung heavy over us. And I felt so out of

place. Out of doors was better, and the prestige one enjoyed among all those who had not yet been abroad made one feel that one had done something.

The day came and I found myself back at Victoria among that harrowing crowd of white-faced, dry-eyed parents and relatives. I forbade any of mine to come, and can hardly bear to think of it now. It's no good crying over spilt blood, or that about to be spilt, but I almost wished they would cry, some of those women.

We went back to the same sector of the line and H.Q. occupied a camp on the Elverdinghe road. I expected to rejoin the battalion, but all sorts of odd jobs turned up, and I never actually went further than the Canal bank, but was sent from one place to another, taking charge of the new camps and dumps that were being created on all sides, as the needs of the prolonged War mounted and mounted. The sector was becoming unrecognisable for the place I had come to in the previous year; railway lines, roads, training schools and depôts of new organisation began to fill those empty water-logged fields, while the steady, if gradual, extension of the shelling drove many a rest camp or gunner or sapper formation further back.

It was during this tour, I think, that there occurred one of those desperate but little-known battles that were all very well viewed from a distance and sufficient shelter, but which cost very dear and might have materially altered the course of the War. The Germans were deeply involved at Verdun, and must have been already conscious of what we were preparing in the Somme. They made a determined, if limited, assault on the southern part of the Salient, caught the Canadians in the midst of a relief or at some inauspicious moment, and captured Maple Copse. I was roused by the blowing

of the conches that had now been set up in most forward lines as a gas-signal, and pulling on boots and respirator, I climbed the staging of our water-tank and got my glasses on the red glow that shot heavenward from what I judged to be the Hooge–Hill Sixty sector. The telephones were already busy, and suddenly, far and near over all those camps about us, the bugles rang like so many cocks a-crowing, while the concealed heavies—twelve and fifteeen inch—made the roofs of our huts lift and rattle. The entire Corps stood to arms. The counter-attack was a failure, and the morning dawned with the enemy enjoying a full view of the 'Pop'-Ypres road and making it difficult to supply and garrison the defences of the northern Salient, while the whole plain down to St. Eloi was commanded by his new vantage point. A Brigade of Guards and some Scottish troops were hurriedly brought up and launched, and the line was recovered and stabilised. It was the last combat of which any detail could be distinguished for a long while. The next excitement was the news of the Easter rebellion in Dublin. It seemed very remote.

I cannot say if it was the result of Maple Copse, or whether merely a part of the general evolution of the War, but about this time Divisional Headquarters moved from Elverdinghe road to the Trappist Convent at St. Sixte, near Woesten, a good five miles further back. At least it was typical of what was going on all over the place. I was given the job of clearing up behind the move. For no sooner were the swollen divisional offices gone, than all sorts of units came crowding back —R.E.'s and Medicals who had been shelled out of the lately safe dumps and ambulances near the Canal, and Trench Mortar people who, being a newly-created

arm, found all the best pitches bagged. It was no joke being Camp Commandant over so mixed a multitude, many owing allegiance to all sorts of remote potentates, as the old Divisional authority was swamped and sunk by the changing character of the army. And it was rendered even more difficult for me because I had such sympathy with the units coming down from the line in the middle of the night. I remember the commander of a Trench Mortar battery, with bandaged head and respirator hung open to dry, counting in his men by the light of my sergeant's lantern. I could see him swaying as he stood, dizzy with gas and sleeplessness, and when he had seen his lot in, he turned uncertainly as if he did not know where he was. I took him by the elbow and guided him to the hut reserved for officers. He didn't speak, and so far as I know, may have been unconscious of my presence. His servant was setting out some food, but he simply seized the whisky, drank a gulp from the bottle, and fell down. I shoved something under his head, told his servant not to wake him in the morning, as I would take his parade. I knew so exactly how he felt, or, fortunately, did not feel.

At last, the camp handed over, I moved off to St. Sixte. For good reason I remember that ride. The woods north-west of Elverdinghe were remote from the crowd and clamour of the Salient, and one used to feel that once in their shade was half out of the War. But the War never kept still. I had an old horse that had been salvaged and which my servant christened Roundabout, because, he said, it was in one of those pleasure-machines the grey and weary old beast had last been employed. The A.D.V.S. held other views. He used to wag his head and say that if Roundabout could only talk, what tales he could tell us of Sebastopol and

Waterloo. I knew when I was well off. The animal had a steady trot that got over a lot of ground and rarely shied at anything. This was lucky, for that evening I took a short cut through a pine-wood and jumped a little stream into some rough land beyond. The sound of gibbering tractors had been plain enough, but all of a sudden there came a concussion that nearly blew me out of the saddle. Roundabout stood stock still. I think he felt but did not hear it. I knew in a minute that only one thing could make that noise—the new twelve-inch firing right over my head. As such weapons cannot be rapidly re-loaded, I made a slight détour and came to my tent in the woods by 'International Corner,' as it was called, because a Belgian Gendarme, a French Gendarme and a British Military Policeman all had their sentry-boxes there. The invasion of those century-quiet woods was a sign of the times.

The camp at St. Sixte was comfortable and safe, and the white-robed silent monks were a picture as they moved about their duties. Particularly the Prior, with his amethyst and ivory crucifix, struck us as a notable figure. Tall and handsome, he had polished manners and speech and treated us 'as if he were a gentleman,' as I think the A.D.M.S. said. That same A.D.M.S. strongly objected to an open muddy farm pond that occupied a corner of the orchard on which huts and tents were pitched. He insisted, and the ever-obliging R.E.'s produced trench pumps and pumped it dry. That evening the Camp Commandant found something akin to mutiny among the officers' servants, and a great placard, printed in English, 'There is no more beer,' hung across the closed door of the buttery. The Prior, when questioned, pointed out that he could not make beer without water, and that his pond had been

pumped dry. He could no longer sell the produce of his brewery, or he would have none for himself. I forget what the A.D.M.S. did next. For just as I thought my job was coming to an end, the 1916 feeling became the 1916 reality, that kaleidoscopic shifting of divisions began, which was the characteristic of the later half of the War and the extinguishment of the last traces of individual character. For what particular duty I went to Armentières I cannot now remember, but although I am clear enough that it was not as a company officer, I have the most vivid recollections of the company headquarters to which I went.

Buildings were still standing in the reserve trenches, the front line was a raised breastwork that could have been (and, in fact, subsequently was, in 1918) blown to bits with all its holders in a few minutes. The whole sector was one of the curiosities of the War. From 'Plugstreet' to Laventie the line formed a Salient just as abrupt and exposed as that of Ypres. The apex was filled with the considerable cotton and general manufacturing town of Armentières, the suburbs of which ran into the front line. For some reason or other the Germans let it alone for three and a half years, and a civil population of thousands worked in its factories and lived in its slums. Trains no longer ran to its station, and as hardly a day passed without one or more shells falling in the place, it could never for long be mistaken for a back area town. Yet very decent restaurants flourished almost up to the end, and it was possible for company officers who, ten or twelve miles to the north, would not have found such accommodation within a day's march, to walk out of their trenches to get a hot and by no means stinted meal. In fact, de G. vowed that for many months after the beginning of

trench warfare the inhabitants still obtained electricity from the Lille power station, which was in the hands of the Germans. The Maire attended the usual courts and functions, the Gendarmes schooled the civil population, and a big convent, though largely used by us as a hospital, contained a number of French nursing sisters. The Town Major, a self-contained officer in slacks, had an office there also, but I remember noticing that his desk was built upon an iron grille, below which all the materials for a fire were ready laid, so that he could always get out in a hurry, as he explained. Whatever the job was there, it soon came to an end. Everything was overshadowed by the importance of the zero day, the opening of the Somme battle.

It seems pathetically childish now, to tell what we felt like. I do not think that we realised for weeks that the thing was foredoomed to failure. My division was not in the initial attack, but even when we did go down to the Somme area, we did so in the highest spirits. The weather had been very fine, the Salient, since Maple Copse, unusually quiet. Already Q. office was changed out of recognition. The demands made by the organisation of the new-style offensive had taken the pick of the officers whom I had originally found in comparatively humble capacities, and translated them to very high posts. The G.S.O. 1, G.S.O. 2, D.A.Q.M.G. all went to Corps jobs, and after them the A.D.V.S. The Colonel of my battalion and the General of my Brigade gave up and went home, worn out. These was merely changes. The thing that impressed one more was the extent of the new artillery armament that people like myself had seen growing piecemeal, but never concentrated before—in fact, the Somme was its first great concentration. We had never seen the terrific efforts of the

French at Arras all the summer of 1915, or the Germans at Verdun in 1916, or realised, from the attackers' point of view, why no offensive could possibly succeed. And if I was misled, how much more so were two-thirds of the army who went into the Somme who had never seen Ypres in 1915, and only knew the Allies as efficient in artillery and constant in initiative. I was well on the way to being an old fogey, with my memories. All round me were not merely individual reinforcements but whole divisions from Egypt, Ireland, or training camps. I think I too should have felt that nothing could stop us, but had the advantage of the close companionship of de G. The change in him was remarkable, particularly after we got the first news of the Somme battle and the true state of affiairs became manifest. Fewer and fewer came his jokes, proper or improper, rarer his bright reminiscences of polo, or his axioms on food and drink, less vocative his interest in the fair sex or the equine species. We bade farewell to de V., who, like all officers of the Belgian Mission, remained on his own territory and was transferred to the Corps that replaced us in Belgium. We gave him a parting dinner, and after the seniors had withdrawn (administrative work now became very heavy) de G., in a last flash of the old romantic spirit, made our other ally stand to attention against the wooden door, while there was demonstrated to us one of the Basque national customs (according to de G.), which consisted in collecting all the pocket-knives of the rest of us (and as we were by then mainly territorial or Kitchener enlistments, these were the 1914 issue type) and throwing them from the other end of the Mess, so that they stuck in the woodwork all round de V.'s martyr-like person, just not perforating him. This ceremony being concluded, we carried the

victim shoulder-high to his waiting horse, and that military descendant of Charlemagne departed. I never saw him again, and have regretted it.

Now all was bustle and preparation. The division entrained, de G. and I, after a final clear up, were to follow by road. I shall never forget the last evening in the Mess, the hurried meal, the half-packed, rigorously cut-down impedimenta, and the very grave news from Verdun over the intercepted Boche wireless, the laconic despatch from the Somme, and the celebrated bungle of the Jutland announcement. Finally de G. burst out:

'Voyons, what have you done—when are you going to do something?'

The fine white moustache of the A.D.M.S. bristled:

'When are you?'

'In less than a week. I am leaving you, sir. I am going to the French Flying Corps.'

'I'll believe it when I see it!'

Here I interposed. It never seemed to me to be worth while quarrelling with one's Allies. I had a perfectly clear conscience, believing that in about the same time as specified by de G. I should rejoin my own battalion. I had equal sympathy with the A.D.M.S., who had known the long defence of the Salient, and with de G., whose country was being so straitly invested. We managed to smooth over the incident and it did not recur, for within twenty-four hours the others had gone and at last de G. and I took a final look at the white bones of Ypres in the evening light.

The Corps Chief of the French Mission was going down in one of Corps cars, so that he had delegated to de G. the use of his official car. I therefore set out for the Somme in a Delaunay-Belleville torpedo driven by a Senegalese, who, de G. assured me, was a Prince in

his own country, and certainly answered to the name of Momodou. It was a wonderful dawn-lit ride. Never shall I see anything so impressive as the fevered sleep of that great army, or group of armies, through which we passed, nor ever have again the eerie sensation of being carried, to fell purpose, with great swiftness, by a big black grinning child. We started with our left, or eastward, horizon lit with the perpetual glimmer and reverberation, while on our right were the solid villages, elm-encircled pastures and small teeming arable fields of Flanders. We descended into the strip of Black Country left to France, and passed between on one hand the twin slag-heaps of Lens, and on the other the glow of the great furnaces of Isbergues. From thence the dawn came up on one side, and on the other, beneath great barren downs, clustered the poor villages of Picardy among their orchards. It was as though we were persons in the nightmare of some giant who lay slumbering all about us. The battle to the east represented a subconscious anguish from which he could not free himself, a sort of pins-and-needles in one side of the brain. The other side peacefully slumbered in the dark blue-shadowed west, amid the untouched countryside. And the sentries down the road were as though he momentarily blinked at us as we hurried on.

We breakfasted at St. Pol and swung along to Frevent, coming to the encampments of French colonials amongst our own, at which our African potentate grinned. Then, in the morning, already sultry, we came up with troops marching into Doullens and recognised the Divisional sign on the limbers. We overtook an infantry regiment that bore my badge, and I looked in vain for any face I could recognise. But from out the ranks of the rear company rose a cheer, and I

found a few that knew me. It was my own battalion, nearly all strangers. And now, most disappointingly, memory lets me down almost completely. Afterwards I learned that the division made one of the early September attacks on the Quadrilateral, assisted by tanks. I can piece together very little of it. Of all the efforts made to save the men up for this supreme moment of offensive, for which we had volunteered, I retain no clear consciousness. Certainly I did not rejoin the battalion at once, for I can remember parting with de G., his light-hearted, ultra-English: 'So long, old man!' Years afterwards I discovered that he kept his word, went to the French aviation corps, and was killed.

I had to go on by train, why and where goodness knows, but I am perfectly clear that, all mixed up as I was with the French troops, I learned then of the disaster that was the real Somme. I can see as plainly as if it were yesterday, a hard-bitten 'adjutant' of one of their infantry formations sitting opposite me in a railway carriage, grumbling: '*Perdre les hommes, comme ça, à gagner quelques centaines de mètres, c'est ridicule!*' Then I remember watching the brigade concentrate, but where I don't know. The last name I retain is that of Acheux, and of an overcrowded and bad restaurant where French officers in utter despondency elbowed me uncomfortably and hardly spoke a civil word. After that, bare downs, great heat by day, cold at night, shell-holes, an enormous landscape of tents stretching across soil as brown and barren as a desert, an intensified clamour of guns, one single prisoner, a very fine-looking big man, covered with red stripes, his hands tied behind him (why, I wonder) and a mounted policeman holding the rope; then files and files of ordinary meek, battered,

bewildered prisoners, without arms or equipment, replacing their helmets by pickelhaube; then a start of glad surprise as the real nature of the tanks (which we took, up to that time, to be some superior water-carrying device) manifested itself; then the horrid whiff of gas and unburied dead; and after this I lose touch completely. The blank period seems to have been about three weeks, as I had managed up to that time to write home about once a week, all my time abroad, and those letters, carefully kept and uninteresting except for their dates, show this gap.

This gap of unconsciousness in my War memories is not so strange as it sounds. The same thing occurred, I think, to most men in a greater or lesser degree. I happen to know where my blind bit is. Most of us, I fancy, must have been incapable of receiving, retaining, and reproducing any impression most of the time—or else how is it that of the millions engaged, only a score or so, even after ten years' opportunity, have written anything about a fairly important period of their lives? Nor is this wonderful as regards the second half of the four years. Originally the effect of certain shells, the bravery of certain units, look and smell of certain places, made a profound impression. But from the time of Verdun and the Somme, the barrages became so enormous and mechanical, the succession of persons and places so rapid, and their characteristics so obliterated, that I doubt if anything was ever as clear as it had been—not excepting War motives.

Anyhow, my recollections do emerge from that blind phase, and on this side of it I catch certain pictures—a long grey lichened roof, with a shell-hole across which pigeons had to flutter to continue their strut beyond. Then a jolting ambulance, and a wonder-

ful apricot dawn below a hill contour of violet wrong side up, from which I think my head was hanging over the end of a stretcher, inverted. I had a querulous companion, begging for or complaining of something; but over this comes a view from the ground of a busy siding, with civilians among the crowd, and of an orderly ceasing to whistle a tune to say:

'Gawd, this b——'s bled t'death! Look 'ere!'

Presumably my companion, certainly not me, as I can then see the interior of a train and a mere boy on the opposite bunk climbing about in pyjamas because he had diarrhœa. Finally, by lamp-light, I was carried, one of four stretchers abreast, into a great palatial building where an elegant, beautiful and titled lady stood to receive us, and wrung her hands murmuring:

'There are so many of you, I don't know you all now!'

No words will ever be found, I think, to express better the period which the Somme marks in the War. Before it she probably did know, or could place, according to the family to which they belonged or the set they frequented, most officer casualties. With the Somme that became finally impossible. Just anybody, everybody, in fact, was there. I still had enough of the old spirit left to want to get up and about and find out what had happened to me. When I found my label described me as suffering from a disorder of the digestive organs, I made the one fuss of my military career, saw the Adjutant, and had that stigma, as I felt it to be, removed. I was bruised so that I could hardly move, singed, but not perforated in any part. I gradually collected my wits and found a letter, that had been chasing me across the armies, from the Commission under which I had been working with the division, and which had its

headquarters in the very seaside resort in which I now lay. As soon as I could walk a little, I got so far, with frequent rests on the seats provided in that city of convalescence, and met the very officer who, two years before, had cleared up behind the Aisne and Marne. I stood to attention until he suddenly said:

'Sit down; you'd better have some tea!' When it came, it was in reality a whisky and soda, and how I enjoyed it! The letter concerned the fact that I had been put on a list of sorts, of persons attached to and clearing up for divisions; and as all such jobs, like everything else, were then being re-grouped and reorganised, I had to be inspected.

I can't remember much else, but know that a week or so later I was discharged from hospital to Base Depôt at Etaples, and was passed fit by a medical board to rejoin my old battalion. Or, more exactly, the new unit which bore the old name. Crawling about hospital, feeling more like a fly on a window pane, I had discovered not brother officers I knew, but reinforcements from the reserve battalion at Colchester, who had already been knocked out in their turn. Two of them were delirious, the other, a cleanish gunshot in the leg, was quietly resigned to the fact that there would be no more fighting for him. I had gathered that the battalion Quarter-master was the only person I was likely to know. So that I regarded rejoining without enthusiasm. On the other hand, anything was better than hospital. In that great shaded hall lay men in every stage of subtraction from their normal selves, ranging from some who had lost most limbs, or half their wits, to those who, like myself, had nothing worse than a shaking and could be patched up. There was a constant passing out of quiet, half-drugged forms, on trolleys, to the

operating theatre, either the one at hand or to others further off. Even quieter forms went away under a Union Jack, the Sergeant-Major preceding, to the mortuary. Of the rest there were some who cried aloud and some who lay in a sort of torpor. The worst from my point of view were the incessantly garrulous, those who, with a faint touch of fever, recounted endlessly their prowess with bomb and bayonet. The silliness of this sort of glory did not seem to strike them. To be maimed for life and to have (at least in imagination, for most of the tales were of exploits of which a modern battle allows no sure evidence) maimed some German, was of course pure cancellation, advancing nothing.

The Base Depôt was better. For one thing, it was so improved as to be unrecognisable for the squalid collection of huts and tents set down in the spirit of 'Get what you want if you can, it's no one's business,' that I remember twelve months before. The immense camp, stretching for miles, was reasonably, if roughly, efficient, and contained, men said, a hundred thousand reinforcements, most of whom had never been out before and were in the highest spirits. I was given the job of conducting a party of French officers over the place, and their favourable comments were gratifying.

Finally our orders came. Another useless attack was preparing, and we had a farewell supper in someone's tent, where a glassy-eyed youngster who had come from South America to fight, told our fortunes by the light of candles stuck in champagne bottles. Mine was that I should not be killed. It was true enough. Next day, while I was waiting to entrain, a District Officer from the Commission, a captain by rank in a famous North Country regiment, came to interview me. Another subordinate was required for the new establishment,

and mine was the first (or perhaps only) name on the list. In twenty-four hours I found myself in a villa beyond the town, with a real bed to sleep in, a table to eat at, and a great pile of papers to deal with.

So far as I could make out, my individual merits had nothing to do with it. The motive behind my transfer was impersonal enough. G.H.Q. had tacitly agreed that no decisive break-through was possible on the Somme. The whole matter of the relations between the gigantic British Armies and the population among whom they lived was therefore being hastily and urgently re-organised on a new basis, that of the civil boundaries, not the military formations. The District Officer who had fetched me was in charge of the Arrondissements of Dunkerque, Hazebrouck and Lille—the remains of the Département du Nord, in fact, other Districts being the Pas de Calais, Belgium and the Somme. What went on, further back, on the lines of communication and the immense camps, depôts, ports, etc., I never knew. We were concerned with troops in the line, or just behind it, our eastward boundary was the evacuated area of actual War, where all occupation, use and damage was *Fait de Guerre*. An attempt was being made (it was never quite complete or successful) to introduce a regular renting of the necessary ground and buildings, with a view to straightening the awful confusion. Up to that time, successive formations went pretty much where and how they liked or could, and their sporadic occupations had been dealt with much as, in the trenches, individual platoons pumped water out of their bit of trench into their neighbours'. The serious misuse of large tracts of valuable food-producing land, the everlasting friction with civilians whose lot we were supposed to be alleviating, had become such a menace,

particularly in view of the submarine campaign and the overwhelming demand for shipping, that it was absolutely necessary to clarify and economise. After a week or two the District Office moved up to Hazebrouck, and the country from the sea to the River Lys, from the trenches to the lines of communication, was divided amongst three of us, and we set to work to get to grips with the problem. I could not be sufficiently thankful. Though the work was hard and often disagreeable, it was not actually dangerous, and it was interesting, and one had the feeling of doing something useful. The War of Attrition meant simply that the side which was in the best heart, whose resources and reserves were best conserved and most adequately administered, would last longest, and would therefore (no knock-out being possible in such a War) be left the victors. And I was further most fortunate in being attached to a District where the oldest and most experienced British Armies, the First and Second, lay, and where the inhabitants were the most business-like, and in finding myself in a Mess in which it was possible to make immediately friendships that have lasted to this day. The District Officer and his second were territorials who had been out since 1914. They were fully occupied with questions of principle and adjudications regarding large amounts, and with great permanent works such as docks and railways, aerodromes and manœuvre areas by which the very face of the country was being changed. The remaining three of us who dealt with current matters were of the new army. We seldom saw each other from breakfast until the evening, when it was a relief to speak English again, talk shop or discuss news, while the gramophone accompanied a quiet game of bridge, not infrequently interrupted by

a summons to headquarters of some formation in difficulties.

Two months passed very quickly and we were getting the arrears of two years' war wiped off, when an S.O.S. came from the Somme district, where the concentration of 1916 had left a mass of affairs, the solution of which had been too long delayed. I was transferred to the Doullens office, and throughout the bitter cold of January 1917 did what I could to get straight the tangle. I remember the case of the 'Cavalry Ride,' a broad track of desolation, miles long, where the cavalry Corps had been brought up clean across a densely cultivated area, in the vain hope of a break through. A few small detachments actually got ahead of the infantry, and met a fate that one would have supposed was a foregone conclusion.

Mid-winter was hardly over, however, before a new stirring, inevitable as the Spring, made itself felt. I was summoned back to Hazebrouck, and in profound secrecy the next phase of the War unrolled itself before me. It seemed as if nothing could long obliterate the sinister attraction that Ypres exercised over the minds of all commanders. For a twelvemonth the Salient had been ominously quiet. Now, the map kept by the District Officer showed the whole line from Hooge down to 'Plugstreet' traversed by narrow, party-coloured streaks, each a corps area, over which sixty thousand men were to operate with the new and hardly credible machinery that belonged to them, as the War now went. Our immediate job was to adjust these arbitrary markings to the civil boundaries, interview all the Maires, with carefully camouflaged proposals as to renting certain properties, and to elicit information as to the nature and use of roads, etc.

The whole scheme was, I feel sure, unparalleled in history, and certainly among the other combatants. French and German authorities had the shortest of short methods with their own or conquered nationals over whose ground, across whose very lives they desired to conduct offensives. On the other eastern battlefields a large proportion of waste land and a low standard of civilisation altered the circumstances. The British Armies, fighting over heavily cultivated and very valuable property of which they were defenders, resorted to no violent expropriation, and the use of the Requisition was strongly discouraged. In the main, the occupation was by consent, billeting being paid at the French rate (not excessive, it may be imagined) and other uses coming within the scope of District Formations, like that to which I was attached, for settlement. The attempt to regulate the matter on a basis of paying the whole or portion of the rent lost by deprivation of use, was never entirely successful. The density of occupation fluctuated too sharply and the necessity for secrecy rendered it imprudent to have too stereotyped a set of horse lines, camps, dumps and parade grounds. Yet in the main, by (I hope) tactful, and never quite empty-handed though sparingly financed interposition between the troops and inhabitants, widespread disciplinary action on the one hand and wholesale plunder and oppression on the other were avoided. Most Flemish and Picard villages preferred British troops to French. One of the main causes of complaint was the military habit of issuing coal to the troops and leaving them to forage for wood with which to ignite it. The very natural result was that in the line men cut up dug-outs, wiring pickets and pit-props; in rest billets they are said to have burnt a million hop-poles and the wood-

work of all bookcases, cupboards, forms, and even whole sheds, carts and ladders disappeared. One had to use one's judgment, cooled by one's own billet-conscience and warmed by one's trench sympathy.

Two factors visibly aggravated our task from week to week. One was the entry of America and the renewed intensification of the submarine warfare, which made the economy of shipping a matter of vital importance, affected by the home production of food in France, of which we occupied the most prolific areas. The other was the colossal space demanded by the machinery the War had called into use, tanks and tractors, aeroplanes and railways. The first two were almost novel and fantastic in their demands for parking. With the others, the nature of the machines had altered. Originally, a few hundred yards of reasonably smooth turf had been considered ample for a plane to take-off from. Now great spaces had to be flattened, smoothed with cinders for the new fast flying, and provided with elaborate lorry standings for their necessary supply, while the original permanent way of the local railways had in places to be quadrupled in addition to ubiquitous 'decauville' tracks.

The length of the War had some curious repercussions. In an estaminet one market day, I heard it roundly declared that the British would never leave France. They had never had so good a country, and had always wanted it. I protested, but was, I could see, not believed.

Yet hope sprang eternal in the breasts of those of us who ought to have known better, and the very considerable advance at Vimy impressed us, who remembered the failure of the French in 1915, and our own useless sacrifice of isolated brigades over that sector.

Finally the day of Messines came. The enormous mines erupted half a countryside, and the divisions walked forward into what remained of the enemy trenches. Even so, some of us began to doubt when we saw the meagre list of guns taken. We were told that special bridges, constructed below the surface of the Lys, had ensured the safe evacuation of most of the enemy's heavy artillery.

I had a wonderful view of this battle, my duties taking me on to Mont Noir and Kemmel. The whole valley and rise lay below me, bathed in mist and battle vapour. Out of this protruded the dozen great sausage balloons, on their thin stalks of wire rope. It was as though one were surveying the garden of some giant, in which great grey-green dahlias were unfurling above a slate-coloured fleecy soil. I never felt the immense impersonality of modern war so keenly. And I was there to prevent the two-and-a-half-years dispossessed farmers from rushing back to reclaim their land. Towards me rolled lorry after lorry of lightly wounded men, cheering mechanically, as if they couldn't stop. I don't suppose one of them had seen a live German, except as prisoner.

It was about this time that we began to hear of the 'knock-out,' 'the fight-to-a-finish,' and other ideas promulgated by people who had no close contact with reality. Not that we realised at the time how much of all we cared about was being 'knocked-out' beside German autocracy! But I can give no one reason for the sensation we all felt from June onward, as though the War had gone sour around us. The fatal delays, the failure of the much-advertised French offensive in Champagne, all contributed. More immediate was the removal of the District Officer to Boulogne Base, it

being found that Hazebrouck was too advanced to make a useful Headquarters, while his second went up to Wormhout, as the stress of the fighting veered north. My friend P. and I were left at Hazebrouck, to cope with the work as far as we could. We used to try and keep Sunday afternoons clear, to write home.

I cannot say that Russian events impressed us, though we discussed them. Then there opened that ill-fated offensive towards Passchendaele. There was nothing hopeful about it. Those of us who knew the Salient, inch by inch, never supposed that it could succeed. The weather broke on the first day, and the attempt to turn the enemy's flank on the seaboard with a secret attack by the 'Hush' division was an appalling failure.

It is difficult to give any useful idea of how the second half of 1917 and the first three months of 1918 passed. I can only say that, if we escaped the worst fatigues and dangers of infantry service, we also missed any rest or respite regimental units got. We were at it all the time, as the immense army became increasingly difficult to adjust to the circumstances in which it found itself. There was no longer any chance of dealing carefully with individual complaints of civilians, or the necessities of single units. As for questions of principle or extensive schemes, we simply packed them off to Headquarters. We could hardly get round the crowded area, and had to resort to holding what resembled unofficial courts in the larger villages or Headquarters of Formations, and meeting there by appointment 'natives' and military alike, and settling differences wholesale. Sometimes they were settled in a more summary fashion. I remember haranguing an awkward crowd in the Caisse d'Epargne of Bailleul, on the shifting of a whole series of parks and dumps behind

Messines for some forgotten reason (or lack of reason). Some didn't want the troops moved (they were a source of profit), others objected to giving up their land. In the middle of it a five-nine brought the roof down on us. I jumped for my respirator, for by that time it was impossible to say how much gas any shell contained. By the time I crawled out of the ruins, the *intéressés* had dispersed and I busied myself freeing a riderless horse that was entangled in the débris. What became of those dossiers I have no idea, but in 1920, visiting my friend S., who had stayed on, I found him marking a lot of cases 'destroyed by gunfire.'

The war belt widened ominously. Hazebrouck was not only bombed continuously, but bombarded from a distance of twenty miles with twelve-inch. Innumerable divisions streamed endlessly up, came under fire all day and all night for a week before they could be engaged, and were hammered into the mud, one after another. The accounts which reached us from survivors confirmed our worst fears. The solid ground was pulped by the concentration of artillery brought to bear on it, so that it would not bear the weight of the human body, and the infantry that reached the forward zone lay down in the dissolving shell-holes and protected themselves as well as they could, which is not saying much. Fortunately, the two of us left at Hazebrouck to deal with the mass of occupation, were so busy that we had little time for reflection. The culmination of this period was that occurrence, chiefly disgraceful to writers about the War, who appear to me to be in a conspiracy to conceal it, the Mutiny at Etaples. All countries engaged in the War had periods of widespread mutiny, a fact which should be noticed and recorded, not hushed up. It took them all differently, according to their national

characteristics. With Germany it was a continuous filtering-through of individuals or small parties who very logically concluded that they would be better off as prisoners in British hands than as combatants. In France, more spectacular defiance of orders paralysed initiative on two notable occasions. In Russia, the slow awakening of the peasant had the well-known results. In Italy it was a continuous corruption and lassitude that left the troops in the line provisioned with chestnut flour only. With the British, as might be expected, it occurred at the great Base camp at Etaples, over some rumoured disagreement with the police. I never knew the truth, and perhaps no one does. For some days a great docile mob walked about the streets completely out of hand, relatively harmless, and eventually returning to camp to be fed. Shortly after, the miserable failure of an offensive was brought to a close. But the effect was permanent. From this time there developed a new spirit of taking care of one's self among the men, which ended, in late 1918, in few rifles being fired, and would, in a few more weeks, have meant the cessation of the War, by the front line not refusing but quietly omitting to do duty. The Armistice came just in time. With the officers, it was the same. When one met one's old division and enquired for one's friends, they had all got jobs in England. And rightly. The art of War is not to get killed in some action which is anyhow useless, but to obtain the best job (*i.e.* the nearest to Whitehall) and tell others how to fight. The army kept together from inertia, inability to feed itself apart from its regular organisation, and political considerations, such as maintaining a bargaining ground for use subsequently. The whole matter is stated with lucidity and authority greater than mine, and from the other side, by

Prince Max of Baden in his *Memoirs*, which show that the Germans counted on the fact that we no longer fought very hard. For instance, the General came round inspecting, and I heard the District Officer who was with him ask:

'I suppose we shall go on fighting next year?'

'I don't know,' was the answer. But he went on, as gently as possible. What could he do? See that he was properly fed every day, little else.

On our own part, I do not think we had much doubt. We had seen the first American units, and did not suppose that, in the long run, Germany or anyone else could withstand the addition of a new continent to an array of Allies that already included most European nations, Japan and China. But in order to give America a chance, we must stay in the War. To confirm this, an order came round to parade for medical inspection. We were all passed fit and cleaned our pistols. At the moment it was obviously more important for us to get on with our job than to add an extra half-dozen to the national provision of cannon fodder, and no order to rejoin our units reached us. We should have obeyed if it had. But as it didn't, why rush in?

An interlude was provided in November, by the remarkable battle of Cambrai. Although limited in scope and barren in result, it remains the one genuine military success of the War. Without wishing to disparage the bravery and hard work done by all grades of secret and intelligence service, I feel that the air of cleverness lent to some fabled exploits and the perpetual legend of wise omniscient leadership belong to the sphere of romance and not to any trustworthy account of the War of 1914-1918. So far as it was possible to tell, on the spot, no one ever knew anything

worth knowing about the enemy, nor was any material fact ever concealed from him. When information was wanted, infantry patrols had to go and get it, or observers take photos from the air. No one had ever any doubt as to where the next offensive was coming, and once the initial 1914 advantage of the Germans in strategy and their tactical profusion of heavy howitzers, machine-guns, gas and submarines was neutralised (a question of supply), the element of surprise disappeared. Amid all this Cambrai stands out as a genuine stroke of military skill, and one which outlined the possibilities of that unique invention, the tank, which were exploited in the following July. At Passchendaele tanks were a complete failure, and in 1919 their burnt-out carcases still littered the Salient by scores. At Cambrai they were successful, but their success was not, or possibly could not be exploited.

After that, any officer who had perforce gained such first-hand experience as was thrust upon me and my colleagues, could hardly avoid taking the plainest view of the War. There, stretched across the world, lay two gigantic factories, equipped with an inconceivable plant of all sorts and manned by whole nations who were simply so many operatives, controlled by officers whose functions were those of foremen, or accountants. Yet even so, the simile will not hold, for the majority of those operatives were the material on which the vast organisation worked, and the finished article made out of them was Death. The whole industry had a likeness to mining ventures, in which work becomes more difficult as it progresses. The best material had been used up and Death was increasingly hard to produce. The machinery was more imposing than ever, but the operatives, from this time forward, began increasingly

to practise ca' canny methods. Necessarily, for the individual was not yet extinct, and saw himself menaced just as much by success as failure of his shift at the machine. Even an immense new organisation of 'schools' whose professors were all, naturally, convinced that the subject they taught was the decisive factor in the War, failed to overcome the natural common sense of the average man.

The Germans, whether from nervousness after Cambrai, or as window-dressing for the following Spring, now began extensive and far-reaching bombardments. Hazebrouck received as many as a hundred twelve-inch shells in a day, and had a civilian casualty list of two hundred, excluding bombing. Against this must be set the fact that some degree of efficiency had been achieved in many of the amenities designed to reconcile the victim to his lot. Proper provision was now made at Boulogne for officers and men going on leave, and the period was extended. I made use of my first Christmas leave to get married. This was regarded as a fatal step, a superstition that grew up with the huge casualty lists. I never shared it, and my good luck, always above the average, justified me.

There was a sort of fatal calm about the early Spring of 1918. The weather was beautiful, fortunately, for under the influence of the new style bombardments, camps had to be made remoter and less convenient, and at the least warning, whole populations of towns flocked out on to the adjoining roads, while even Armentières was at last evacuated.

The German break-through, when it came, astonished no one except by its success. The story need not be re-told, it is sufficient to remember that from the beginning of their attack from St. Quentin on March

21st to the stabilisation of their second offensive, just south of the Salient, in the first week of May, the Germans re-took everything we British had gained in three years and a half, and even overran the lines of 1914. Naturally, the northern effort interested us most. Its order was methodical and its stage-management, backed up by bombardments of Paris with shell, and of Calais from land, sea and air simultaneously, was impressive. There are many other things that have never yet been satisfactorily explained to me, such as the failure to support the Fifth Army, and the presence of so many troops in England, and I am always waiting for some politician or newspaper proprietor to divulge which of them hoped, in the event of our total defeat, to bring off a *coup d'état*. I did not share their illusions, and the stubborn resistance of Second and First Armies, divided as they were by the virtual annihilation of the Portuguese Corps, and the complete nipping off of the Armentières Salient by the attack through 'Plugstreet,' involving the loss of the infantry of three divisions, reduced the formidable German effort to an average progress of a mile a day, as against a much more rapid advance in the south.

From the opening of the second or northern attack on the 11th April, P. and I found it impossible to do any work. The noise was deafening, the traffic incessant, and the constant applications for assistance from civil as well as military sources, continuous. By good luck the sub-District car had been left with us, and as we were entirely without orders, we did what we could. I endeavoured to obtain shovels and arms in order to organise some sort of defence of the Aire road suburb of Hazebrouck, but was refused. After that, we contented ourselves with giving assistance in the reorganisation of

lorry routes over a set of roads that had been for years unused to first line transport, and which, from our daily job, we knew as well as our own back gardens.

The scenes witnessed, if depressing and sometimes tragic, were interesting. We had never seen the great retreats of 1914. I remember the General of the division cut off in Armentières coming to my office to ask if I had seen anything of his signallers. He bore a celebrated name and came from a celebrated regiment. His stoicism was admirable. I remember thinking: 'So that's what a defeated General looks like'—just like anyone else.

I remember, too, Merris, in the afternoon sunshine, pillars of black smoke arising all round the horizon. Two streams of transport were passing, while on the pavement sat a peasant woman, her head bandaged, nursing in her lap the head of a boy, from a county regiment, who seemed to be dying.

For five days a continual stream of civilians of all ages, conditions, and states of health, passed us, with every conceivable vehicle, from farm-cart to wheel-barrow or bath-chair. One by one, Maires or Secretaries of Communes, or priests or notables with whom we had dealt, went by, on the whole orderly and not despairing. Some would call out a greeting or remark. They were sorted out at Ebblinghem, and sent away to Normandy or the south. Some were wounded. Not a few had been killed, or remained to face and live with the invaders and were discovered by us, a year after, still working their farms or tending their shops. In the opposite direction passed the few hurried detachments of British troops, rushed up on pontoon-carriers, helmeted and taciturn. The battle swayed daily nearer, the gunning decreasing, the machine-gun fire approaching,

heavy batteries, that belonged to the banks of the Lys, dug in all round us, the eyes of officers and men red with gas, and many having lost most of their clothes. I made a last journey to Bailleul. That busy thriving place was empty, great shells crashed echoing in its streets. In the middle of the square, all alone, stood Martineau, the Town Major's interpreter. He shook his head at me, but could not speak. Outside the town, detachments of infantry moved forward in artillery formation. I could see no guns. But ambulances were plying fearlessly.

Finally, the day came on which the military authorities appeared to have abandoned, the civilians to have evacuated Hazebrouck, and there was nothing for us to do but await the order to join some unit. No further troops came up, and reconnoitring the streets, revolver in hand, we came to the conclusion that there was no use remaining in the open and empty town, and we reported to the Town Major of Boeseghem as being the nearest authority and the one on the direct line to Calais, at which one supposed the Boche were thrusting.

The mild Spring night was beautiful, the clamour of the guns had ceased, and the Germans, once reduced to the status of normal men, who had outmarched their imposing machines, lost their impressiveness. All along the horizon, from Wulverghem to Merville, great dumps were burning, and over each captured position hung a floating light. St. Omer was empty, Cassel in a state of defence. We reached Boeseghem after midnight. We lay down, in full equipment, in the Town Major's office, and slept.

We woke in the morning to the sound of renewed gunning and the ceaseless clatter of hoofs. An entire Corps of cavalry passed through to Hazebrouck. In

1916 and 1917 they had made magnificent but unavailing excursions to the front, but in 1918 they regained their prestige. The war of movement appeared to be resumed. Regiment after regiment rode by and we followed them up, to find that a miscellaneous force had apparently kept the Forest of Nieppe clear, while further south the Canal had prevented the Germans entering Bethune or St. Venant. To the north, a French Corps had taken over the south of the Salient, and although Kemmel and Bailleul were lost, Locre was held and Strazeele re-taken, so that any attempt at fortifying Hazebrouck would have been futile. The enemy never got within bullet range of it.

We remained a few days at Boeseghem, watching demolition engineers affix their charges to the bridges over the Canal, and making ourselves useful in any way we could. About a fortnight in all must have elapsed before it was known that the line was definitely stabilised. The whole of Passchendaele was lost, and the defence ran from near Hooge to Westoutre and Mont Noir, disputed Meteren and held Strazeele and the Forest. The Corps that had been decimated in the Armentières battle, and the Portuguese were withdrawn. P., to my great regret, was detailed to go with the former, and I was placed with S., an officer of 1914 experience who had been working the Dunkerque Arrondissement from Wormhout, to clear up British occupation in that zone now held by the French. Once more, my good luck withdrew me from the infantry and placed me with a colleague with whom I was on as excellent terms as with P. We set to work at once to make ourselves acquainted with our new superiors and to get the job into order.

I shall never forget our visit to the French Corps

Headquarters in the very Château in which I had last seen my divisional General. The contrast was extraordinary. Their Corps command was a less elaborate affair than ours for a division. Two or three dry silent old men sat in what had been the General's Mess, amidst maps and telephones. They seemed to sit there all the time, while an old orderly with the face of a priest brought them sandwiches and little tumblers of wine and water. There was no social life, no polo, tennis or bridge, very few cars. They looked more like a chess tournament than a brilliant general staff. I suspect though that they were extremely efficient. They allotted us a billet and outlined the contact they expected to have with us, and dismissed us with a nod. No manners, no 'the-D.A.Q.M.G.-will-tell-you-to-report-to-the-Town-Major-who-will-send-his-sergeant-to-direct-you.' They gave us two rooms in a farm, and their silence left us to infer we might get on with it. We did.

Outside, the roads were packed with French cavalry horses, going up to fetch back the riders, who had been in the line and were mostly killed. Behind them the relieving infantry were dropping out all over the road, while the most sinister provost-sergeant I have ever seen, and his squad, heaved them into the ditch like sacks, to allow the steady stream of British lorries, each with a 75 mm. gun trailing behind, to go tearing up to their positions.

Then came the period which to me was far more dramatic than anything that happened subsequently. Behind us, the whole Portuguese Corps, and a young army of Labour units, either force numbering over 20,000 men, entrenched the entire countryside, right back to the Boulogne downs, while great patches of

land round St. Omer were inundated. For a week or so, all reserve troops stood to arms. But by the end of May, the French were going or gone from our sector, and the British divisions that took over *could not find the enemy*. It was not merely that the German shock troops had been taken further south, for the brief but brilliant offensives towards Montdidier and beside Rheims. There was already perceptible something like a moral collapse in the adversaries of all those years. I have heard subsequently all sorts of reasons for it—influenza, bolshevism, exhaustion, and the new unity of command among the Allies. My own impression was that the War of Attrition, that from 1914 had appeared never-ending, at last produced a marked depressing effect, and that, necessarily, upon the side that represented only about a third of Europe, and not on the side that drew its resources from four continents and a bit. In June, a most significant incident occurred. It had been decided to re-take the hamlet of Outersteene, the only piece of high ground the enemy now held above the Lys Valley, Bailleul having been knocked flat and filled with gas, and Kemmel apparently abandoned by him. The division entrusted with this minor operation sent for me, in order to obtain a site for a manœuvre ground where the attack might be rehearsed.

I went at once, expecting that they would want something right back by St. Omer; what was my astonishment to find that they had selected a site between Morbecque and the Nieppe Forest, that is to say, in the evacuated area, and about three miles from the trenches. I asked if they really meant this, and they replied that they did, and that they didn't believe the enemy were holding the line. I then realised that the War was dissolving before my eyes. In a little over four weeks, the

largest and most successful offensive of the War had petered out, and even nullified itself. Armentières could have been re-taken, had it been worth the effort. The plan, however, was to move further south, and the old Second Army front relapsed into increasing quietude, giving S. and myself a chance to get into some sort of order the results of the wholesale evacuation and retreat of the spring and the subsequent French occupation.

Everybody knows the rest: how the Germans struck once too often and the long-prepared British offensive followed, crumpling up their front. Nothing was undertaken in the north until October, but long before that the enemy's resistance was weakening, and it became necessary to go forward into a strange country, where the curiously open landscape, from which buildings and trees had been obliterated, was unrecognisable for the District over which I had worked, amid a crowded British occupation, for over a year. Everywhere the signs of flight, and ill-organised flight, first British, then German, were visible; large unburned dumps, isolated machine-gun posts, and unburied bodies. We made a survey, anticipating a speedy repatriation of the refugees, when it would be vital to know exactly to what line the *Fait de Guerre* ruling extended.

Here, on the ruins of Meteren, my last shell of the War, fired from a great distance, flung its mud and stench over me. The artillery were still fighting each other, but I saw no more rifles used. Eventually I went up to Roubaix with H.Q. Second Army, but, once the Armistice was signed, the District was moved to Dunkerque, where S. had already been instructed to arrange for a camp capable of demobbing fifteen thousand men per day. There was no job for me on the

Rhine, and I had no desire to go there. The object for which I had enlisted was achieved. The Germans were back where they belonged. That, so far as I was concerned, concluded the matter. For me, there remained a last round, from the Lys Valley up to the southern boundary of the Dunkerque Arrondissement. The evidences of disintegration were everywhere visible. All sorts of demobilised Frenchmen came home to find the various fates that had overtaken their property. The new spirit, of handing out large sums of money on insufficient pretexts, but in the hope of getting it paid by Germany, was already manifest. An entirely new kind of British officer, covered with tabs, hat-bands and spurs, but with suspiciously new-looking belts and boots, and a transparent ignorance of the country and the events of the past years, came pouring out of England. With us, who had been on the spot so long, there was no desire except to have done with it all. The fantastic machine that had been gradually created around and about us, incorporating us, in fact, as inconsiderable gadgets, was suddenly thrown out of gear, useless. Worse, it was a nuisance, a thing of which we all wanted to be rid. Nor was the feeling confined to those who had served longest and most variously.

At Morbecque, that January, I found a 'meeting' being held by the rank and file of a heavy artillery brigade. The officers, quite helpless, kept out of sight. Senior N.C.O.'s were in the chair (the box of a G.S. wagon), questions were being asked, and a resolution formulated, setting out grievances over demobilisation proposals. And why not? The proceedings were perfectly orderly and quite logical. Great Britain had had the services of all those men (and in such a formation, a relatively high proportion of skilled labour). The

leadership had not, to speak charitably, been anything brilliant. The camouflage of press and platform utterance failed to convince that great mass of decent, peace-loving citizens, who never wanted to be, and never were 'soldiers,' that they had won anything except the right to exploit the opportunity, according to the example set them from high places. Intelligent mechanics and clerks were under no illusion as to the nature of the 'fighting' in which they had been engaged. They made no revolution, as their like across more than half Europe did. They just wanted to go home, before someone pinched their jobs. I sympathised with them, the more so as I suffered nothing in the way of indignity. There were, I have heard, cases of maltreatment of officers, but I have wondered if the victims did anything to attract it. I made no difference in my bearing towards the rank and file, and none of them ever attempted to disregard my orders.

It was only too clear to what pass years of dishonest or inept politics, new industrial methods, and the obliteration of the individual had brought us. I doubt if Napoleon or Marlborough could have done any better, had they been resurrected in modern circumstances. The general level of intelligence and efficiency of the ranks had risen, and the commonplace types at the head of affairs were thus even more noticeably dwarfed by comparison with the average humanity over which they were given such unwarrantably despotic power, than in the nearest historical parallel situations. After South Africa Kipling wrote:

> 'Ye that tread triumphing crowned, to your meed
> Worthy God's pity, ye best who succeed.'

The length of the War had broken down all patience, and most other virtues, in fact. Germany's mistakes had

thrown such resources into the scale against her that she had succumbed. This is what 'Victory' amounted to; the dumb equilibrium of an iceberg that rights itself, according to the laws of gravity.

There remained, most serious of all, the moral exhaustion of civilised peoples. It was obvious to me when I got home, and found a whole way of life gone out of fashion. Even then I did not know the worst. I should never have believed, in 1919, that the silly creeds of violence and greed could hold so conspicuous a place in Europe for nearly ten years. A new vision is already overdue. We must hope that it may not be long retarded, for in spite of vapourings about ex-combatants imaginatively 'fighting their battles o'er again,' we are not yet saved. We are on reprieve. One more slip-back into that negation of the social contract that 1914-1918 was, and we can hardly hope that the slow but sure logic of existence will give us another chance.

On the whole, the attempt of the civilised nations of the twentieth century to return to barbarism was a failure. Again and again the most deliberate steps had to be taken to procure an artificial ferocity that human beings no longer readily feel. The difficulty lies, I think, in the weakening of the fascination which, as I have said, War exercises on account of its great moments, in common with Religion and Love. Just as religious observance is falling into disuse, if not under suspicion, just as the *grande passion* is no longer lightly excused and is subjected to an impersonal scrutiny, so the few great moments of battle are insufficient to obscure the dreary monotony and brainlessness of soldiering. And there is a further and apposite deterrent. If human beings are less deliberately warlike, the necessity for accumulating, nowadays, great mountains of machinery and

supplies before a small percentage of the men engaged can 'fight,' re-introduces the cold-blooded calculations of murder, at the expense of the generous sacrifice that used to sanction Christian armies. A sword-cut is forgivable, slow poisoning is not.

What conclusion, then, is the citizen of Western Europe to draw from his personal experience? Let him, if possible, like myself, be neither permanently maimed nor embittered, nor deluded by the attempts of our would-be Napoleons and imitation Pitts to exculpate themselves by inculpating their fellows in war-guilt. And let him feel, if possible, like myself, that last phase of military justification, a warm comradeship with those slim, erect figures, helmeted, belted and booted, owning nothing save a few letters in the breast pocket, or a locket, and devoid of any relationship except the common dedication to early and unnecessary death. He cannot feel it impossible that the nations among whom he lives might be stampeded once more into the use of violence to settle some dispute. Nor can he doubt that it will, when it comes, be a national War—not an affair of professional soldiers, but a struggle into which the entire strength of peoples will be thrown, deliberately. Even if 'voluntary' methods of recruitment are admitted, they only make matters worse, in view of the startling disparity between the sacrifice demanded of the individual and the personal result to him, eventually.

There is little hope that a swift conclusion by surprise will be more effective, as means of communication improve and war machinery grows more grotesquely impressive, than in 1914-1918. We must therefore be committed to a series of 'offensives,' efforts to dissipate the deadlock. I am convinced that no offensive can succeed. Ypres, Verdun, the 1918 display of the Ger-

mans, Arras, Champagne of the French, the Somme, Passchendaele, Vimy of the British, all failed, not because of the defence they met, but because the methods of attack employed to-day stultify themselves. The machine is of such size and complexity that it soon gets beyond human control. Thus there is, in my belief, no means of avoiding the War of Attrition, which, in turn, inevitably brings a complete contempt of the social, political and industrial leaders, the military ones having such insignificant influence. Herein lies the great menace to our civilisation. Can anything be done to forestall it that is not already being done?

I can only suggest that it should be explained to the would-be recruit for the next war, that under no possibility can he 'fight.' Of the million enlistments of the late War, very few ever saw a German, fewer still can be sure of having personally done any injury to one, and I never met in the field any real hatred of the enemy. Next time fewer still will operate, across great distances, complicated engines directed against centres of population as per map. To call this 'fighting' and thus associate it with Homeric (or even Crimean) traditions, is to perpetrate a fraud upon the public, upon a large scale. And modern nations can only be stampeded or deluded for short and decreasing periods. When they discover for what they have sacrificed their high standards of comfort and liberty, they become ominously resentful. It might be as well not to give them reason to be so. Such is the conclusion of my personal record of the War.

# GLOSSARY

A.P.M.—Assistant Provost Marshal (Member of Divisional Staff).

A.D.M.S.—Assistant Director of Medical Services—Head Doctor of a Division.

A.D.V.S.—The same for Veterinary Service.

A.A. & Q.M.G.—Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General. Senior officer on Q. side of Divisional Staff.

B.H.Q.—Battalion Head Quarters.

C.O.—Commanding Officer.

C.T.—Communication Trench.

D.A.C.—Divisional Ammunition Column.

D.A.D.O.S.—Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Services. Attached Divisional Staff.

D.A.Q.M.G.—Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General. Second Officer, Q. side, Divisional Staff.

D.A.A. & Q.M.G.—Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master General (Third on Q. side).

Fire-bays.—Those portions of front line trenches in which men stood on the fire-step, to shoot over the parapet. They were divided by traverses—*q.v.*

G.S.O.—General Staff Officer. There were three of these on the 'fighting' or G. side of Divisional Staff.

'K' Enlistments.—Kitchener's Army.

M.G.—Machine-gun.

M.G.C.—Machine-Gun Corps.

Minenwerfer.—Mine-thrower, a sort of trench mortar.

M.O.—Medical Officer.

M.C.—Military Cross.

N.C.O.—Non-Commissioned Officer.

O.C.—Officer Commanding.

O.P.—Observation Post.

PILL-BOX.—An enlarged pillar-box of concrete, to protect a machine-gun crew.

R.S.M.—Regimental Sergeant-Major.

S.A.A.—Small Arms Ammunition.

TRAVERSES.—Thick sandbag partitions built in trenches, to prevent enfilading, and to confine the effects of shell-fire.

TRAVERSING.—Sweeping fire by pivoted machine-guns.

# BROADCHALK

A CHRONICLE
*by*
JOHN EASTON

## PART I

*Grace Before Meat*

*To* C. H. L. SKEET

*This record is, I earnestly believe, a true and exact narrative, and the fact that you could find no error in it has brought comfort to a chronicler confronted with the task of probing his memory after an evasion of fourteen years.*

*I have written the narrative in the third person, for it would be idle to lay claim to any kinship of mind with the phantoms I have raised; but our memories are a pool, as it were, in the depths of which we can see a reflection of old thoughts, passions and fears: and while we stoop over these still waters we hear the echo of forgotten phrases and the cadence of forgotten voices, unfolding a pageant of forgotten scenes and places.*

*I am not ashamed of the part played in the battle by the men with whom we served, so that I have not thought it necessary to conceal the identity of our unit, but I have changed the names of our friends, for one cannot shout them aloud in the market-place.*

GLASGOW, *1929*

# I

They crossed from Folkestone on the last day of August. There was a bright moon; the sea was so calm that the boat gave neither shudder nor lurch; only a light on the starboard bow where the escort kept pace, or moved up to thrust her nose into the shadows beyond, showed that the ship was gliding through the water. A thousand men, some in anguish, were lurking on that small steamer, thronging companions and alleys, wedged into its holds, packed wherever a square foot of standing room could be found. Each man gripped his rifle, jostled for some ledge on which to rest his pack, shuffled his feet and, under his breath, extolled the humour of his position with Cockney wit. 'No smoking: no talking.' The order of the day had not survived a second reading; who could be silent while Corporal Park gave such testimony of his inability to ride the water in comfort, even on the calmest sea? Corporal Park was admonished, edged and pushed into a remote corner, finally encouraged to fresh efforts. It was close in the hold, and the Cockneys gave him no mercy.

'Ere, corporal. That ain't a chicken-'ouse. That's a port'ole.'

The company purred gently to the sally.

On the deck two boys stood in silence in the bows. Their combined ages amounted to forty years: between them they were responsible for the lives of one hundred and twenty of the men stored below the hatches. There

had been a good supper: cold chicken and ham: fruit salad: two whiskeys and a glass of port: served by stewards in striped cotton coats, for all the world as if it was a normal channel crossing. It seemed all wrong, such a supper when one was on active service; when the adventure for which the battalion had been training for twelve months had at last begun. The rest of the mess were below, playing bridge, or sitting round a bottle of whiskey, talking their endless chatter of small beer: only one other officer was on the deck, an old soldier subject to Corporal Park's complaint: he was marching vigorously up and down to ward off the cataclysm that seemed imminent.

They were quietly expectant, gleaning with full hands what they could find in that treasure-field. Trevor, the taller, was not given to emotion: he enjoyed himself with his eyes half closed, as if he feared to reveal his thoughts even to himself: when he laughed aloud it was with a curious, forced chuckle that surprised even his friends; Broadchalk was less restrained.

Five lights appeared on the port bow. 'Gris Nez,' said Trevor, who had crossed with the tail of the Expeditionary Force in October as a private, and had reached Bailleul before he had got his commission. 'We shall land in half an hour.' Broadchalk laid his hand on the sleeve of Trevor's coat; he was not ashamed of his excitement and enthusiasm. His eyes glistened, his nostrils quivered, his breath came more quickly. This was the war at last. He was no fire-eater, no man to hold a stair against a hundred clamouring rebels; twelve months ago, when they measured his chest expansion, it had needed the friendly finger of the examining doctor to extend the tape to the regulation thirty-two inches. Six months in the ranks had remedied the de-

fect, had changed him into a small but wiry creature, with plenty of endurance and the power of falling asleep when and where he was bid, of waking fresh and fit for the task in hand—but he was no champion to flout Apollyon with the bayonet. He was reserve Machine-Gun Officer, with enough imagination to make work interesting for his men. While the battalion had spent irksome, boring days at Bisley, lying on their backs in the sun, aroused from their stupor at long intervals for a few rounds of desultory firing, Broadchalk and twenty picked men had played games on Blackdown: worming their way through sentry groups, their caps bedecked with bracken: wriggling under cover with their wooden dummy gun until they had reached the coveted position from which the enemy could be enfiladed and turned from his position. The men liked it. They peopled the woods and bracken with a living enemy: to crawl to the canal was a creepy, fearsome business: a hostile picket might rise from any bush: a bayonet might be driven into the back without challenge and warning.

Such was war as Broadchalk saw it, as he had seen it all his life. His childhood was wrapped in memories of the South African War, when he had crept downstairs from his bedroom to collect the *Graphic* and *Black-and-White* from the door-step, and had climbed the stairs again with his treasure. Those were the days when each journal had its own artist at the front—men with Broadchalk's conception of the significance of battle: lancers charging a Boer commando: a vulture watching for its prey to die: war-worn men, in sun-helmets, some carrying greatcoats, all smoking pipes, all haggard and woe-begone—British prisoners being marched into Pretoria.

He could see and feel it all: the mad glamour of the charge: the dull pain of that lingering death in the presence of nature's epitome of all that is foul: the misery and failure stamped on those woe-begone faces. So Broadchalk the child, and so Broadchalk as he was pitched into manhood.

His mind still fed on enthusiasm: he believed in the superiority of the Briton: in the invincibility of the Empire on land and sea: in the fact that his Division was not as other divisions: in the calm ability of a senior regular officer: in the outstanding efficiency of his battalion: in the supremacy of his own company, and in the unchallenged position of number eight platoon. His imagination hovered over the team, rather than over the individual; suffice that he commanded number eight platoon.

He knew that many of his brother officers were more magnificently proportioned, better clothed, and had a far greater knowledge of the world, its vices and virtues; for Broadchalk was wholly innocent. When he let his imagination play upon himself he imposed no limits—he hugged the mentality of the small boy, gloating over those fiery pictures of Colenso and Spion Kop; he picked up the message of those glittering lances and transfixed Boers and relayed it to the plains of Flanders or the beaches of Gallipoli. He pictured himself at the head of his gallant sixty-four, storming a trench, charging through to the guns, stabbing gunners, spiking breeches, scattering limbers, pressing on until he reached a courtyard guarded by a sentry in a *pickelhaube*; a thrust and the *pickelhaube* rolled from a crumpled petal of a man—then on through the courtyard into the very room where a solid, omnipotent, exclusively military Prussian general bent over a map.

Thus was the breach made through which the British cavalry would pour, and roll up each flank while the gallant survivors of the sixty-four held an army at bay. Thus, and always, Broadchalk—a mild creature with an imagination that would stand no bottling.

He had never revealed the ragings of his intemperate mind to Trevor: only Small had guessed: Small, his greatest friend—both in girth and magnanimity—who had been left behind at the depôt. A gentle pressure on Trevor's arm was the nearest Broadchalk could fashion to intimacy: to Small he would have burbled, and gloried in the rumble of the big man's answering laughter.

In the tent which they had shared at Shoreham and Purbright, Small and Broadchalk had looked forward to France. Small, in the maturity of his years and the largeness of his mind, painted the true picture, but he made no attempt to lay a sacrilegious finger on Broadchalk's dream-canvas. He had tried to supplement it with some preparation for a future when war should end: to inculcate a taste for pictures and literature, some interest which should lead to a career: to conjure some vision of a Broadchalk settled in civil life—as scholar, playwright—even as architect. But Broadchalk would have none of it. His eyes were firmly fixed on the glass of beer he was to drink in Unter Den Linden on the day the British Army marched into Berlin—a sedate and dignified performance in which he played many rôles —sometimes at the head of number eight platoon, when the achievements of that devoted body of men were extolled by the dark red ribbon on their commander's breast: sometimes as commanding 'B' Company, with three stars on his sleeve and a D.S.O. ribbon: occasionally as a Major, commanding the

battalion, waiting for his brevet lieutenant-colonelcy to be gazetted, with as many ribbons as an old regular who had fought in Egypt and the Sudan: once even as the small figure perched on a large horse, standing, in direct succession physically and mentally to the conquerors of the world, under a mighty *Arc de Triomphe*, taking the salute.

Broadchalk had said good-bye to Small that afternoon, when the battalion had marched away to Woking station for entrainment.

The boat changed course, south-eastwards: Gris Nez twinkled on the port beam. 'Boulogne,' said Trevor, with an air of finality. He looked at Broadchalk, noticed for the first time the hand on his sleeve, and the unveiled excitement in the boy's face. He uttered one of his surprising chuckles, and returned the grip in earnest.

## II

They disembarked on the jetty in darkness, and filed towards the town, noisily, as a chattering, excited crowd of schoolboys scurries towards a circus tent. They fell in on markers, and at once became a machine, an infantry regiment in close column. The English words of command fell strangely on the air, for Boulogne seemed a city of the dead. Here and there *poilus* lounged, waiting to board a train, their new blue uniforms—for they had just discarded their red trousers and dark blue coats—shining white in the moonlight. They smiled at the excitement of the newcomers. For them the war represented a band of fire stretched across their country, to which men went as a matter of course—went and re-

turned or went and stayed. They were going back that night: they might have been going to the office, they took it so calmly.

'Three times, *mon lieutenant*,' answered one. 'The last time in the leg.'

Broadchalk stared in surprise. Was it to be taken as lightly as that? He remembered the wounded in London and in Brighton, broken men wheeled about in chairs, or stretched flat on their beds on a hospital balcony—yet this fellow had been hit three times, and was going back with the air of one searching for slugs in a lettuce bed.

They swung through the town, climbed the hill and slept under canvas. For a day they loitered about the camp in groups of threes and fours—writing and censoring letters, changing money, playing bridge. Leave into the town was forbidden to all ranks, talking to civilians was forbidden to all ranks, notices and orders about spies—Broadchalk's spirits rose.

'There's a damned big show ahead,' said the quartermaster, who, by virtue of his office, had spent the morning in the town. 'We're going to turn them out of their trenches and get them on the move at last.'

'Three no trumps,' called Trevor, blowing the smoke of a Turkish cigarette through his nose.

'They've been waiting for the Babe to come out,' said Ennis, the second in command of B Company, with a wink at Broadchalk. 'Hold your hand up, Babe.'

Broadchalk had long suffered the nickname. 'Four spades,' he answered.

## III

In the evening they shuffled down the hill again, climbed into a train and slept. It clanked southwards into a rising mist, hung about at dawn, skirted the coast at Montreuil and halted wearily at a wayside station. An A.S.C. subaltern came to the window, and hailed one of them as a second cousin. 'You fellows are just in time for the show,' he said.

'Where are we?' It was the first question that dawned on four yawning minds, and left four yawning mouths.

'About a hundred kilometres from the line. I expect you're going to St. Omer.'

'Can you hear the guns?'

'Very faintly, when the wind's in the right direction.'

They left that subaltern with scorn, pitying the lot of a fellow in France who could only hear the guns very faintly when the wind was in the right direction. Jolt and clank once more. Ennis, a man of the mature, and to Broadchalk incredible age of thirty-five, produced some sandwiches and a flask of whiskey. The train rattled into a station and pulled up with a jerk and a mighty blast of its whistle.

'Hesdin,' exclaimed Trevor. 'That must be a very long way from the front line.'

'Why, it's the *Les Misérables* country!' cried Broadchalk. 'Don't you remember—'

But the others were already tumbling out on to the rain-splashed platform. Outside they saw the limbers of the transport and machine-gun section, who had crossed to France two days before the battalion. Ennis hurried over to the subaltern in command for news, and returned with a long face.

'Bad luck, Babe. They're going to let the blighters

sit tight a little longer. We have crossed for divisional training. There's not enough room to do it decently at home.'

'Then there's not going to be a show after all?'

'It looks like it—not this year anyhow.'

'Give his moustache time to grow a bit more,' murmured Trevor.

The news ran through the ranks faster than any field message could hope to travel. The men, whose spirits had risen considerably owing to the fact that they had travelled all night in cattle-trucks and were apparently about to attack the German front line, groaned loudly; to add to their troubles the rain started to pour down steadily. Disappointed, their spirits damped by weather and rumour, they set out on what was to prove a harrowing and undistinguished attempt to march twelve miles. It was a poor performance and, as it proved, a foretaste of what was to come later.

It was difficult to apportion the blame, and in the excitement of the landing the warning that it conveyed was overlooked. The battalion had been raised during the first ten days after War entirely from volunteers, and formed part of what was known as Kitchener's Second Army. In its ranks were a sprinkling of men who should never have been passed by the doctor; of these the greater part had been weeded out and sent to the second line, but some had failed to convince a medical board as to their unfitness—or rather their company officers had failed—and by way of window-dressing had been hidden away as orderlies, clerks, stretcher-bearers or bandsmen—anything that would serve as an excuse to keep them off parade and preserve the martial aspect of the fighting unit. Now they found themselves not only on parade, but apparently about to

assault the enemy, their feet soft, their backs unaccustomed to equipment, their ailments very much to the fore. They were loaded with the paraphernalia of the British private on field service—pouches and bandoliers full of ammunition, water-bottles, packs, entrenching tools, spare kit, overcoats and rifles. A strong man, unaccustomed to such a load, staggers until he has acquired the poise and rhythm that makes for steady marching. A weak man casts his eyes to the ground, hunches his back and stumbles forward like a camel. And there were strangers also in the company, drafts from the second line who had been sent to complete the establishment on the very morning that the battalion left for France. Some platoons had four or five of these deputies: some even recognised men whom they had contrived to have transferred to the depôt by a medical board months before on the grounds of physical unfitness. To all these causes must be added the fact that the battalion was undeniably soft as a result of its month of desultory shooting and practice for trench warfare while at Purbright. The men who had marched from Shoreham to Purbright had been of very different calibre: possibly not so polished on parade but ready to attack Steepdown how and when necessary. The battalion finished their brigade training as hard as any veteran general with memories of the Mutiny could have wished: they began Divisional Training in France soft: they were pushed into the front line at Loos softer still—and the irony of it all lay in the fact that it was nobody's fault. An infantryman must shoot and fight in trenches: but he cannot learn the art on a route march. Divisional operations fall lightly on individual units, especially when every square inch of the country is cultivated, including the three-foot patch round the sign-posts at

the cross-roads, for even in 1915 harvests had become as important to France as British Divisions.

So they set out on a weary twelve-miles' march in the pouring rain, each man resembling a Punch and Judy showman, with his mighty pack boxed in a waterproof sheet, which dangled half over his eyes and dripped water down the front of his neck. They tottered over cobbles, they scrunched through churned-up stretches of mud and gravel that served for roads: they straggled and advanced in short rushes at the tail-end of a long column, and they found no smile of welcome on the grim face of the Brigadier. At two o'clock they reached the village of Embry, and turned humbly into their billets.

'Where are we?'

'Embry.'

'Where's that?'

'Pas de Calais.'

'How far from the front?'

A French corporal blew out his moustache in surprise.

'Sixty kilometres from Arras.'

Arras! Broadchalk racked his brains for some solution of his whereabouts. Arras surely was some sort of tapestry—whoever had connected the British Army with Arras? Now if it had been Armentières! He marched his platoon down the hill to the farm in which they were to be billeted.

'*Encore de paille*,' he said to the farmer, staring aghast at the earth-carpeted barn which was considered a fit habitation for '*trente hommes*.' His French was shaky, but he could find no fault with the phrasing of that command—Littré, the French master, had thought a lot of his pronunciation.

The farmer gazed at him in wonder and bewilderment!

'*Encore de paille*,' Broadchalk repeated, with a sweep of his hand towards the floor.

'*Paille!*' The farmer mouthed the word as if it were a new consonant, endowed with the blessing of the French Academy.

'Yes, *Paille!*' The farmer shook his head—almost touched it with his forefinger.

'Here, Corporal Hammett. Tell this devil to bring some straw.'

Corporal Hammett, who was reputed to be a duke's valet in private life, stood stiffly to attention, cleared his throat, and spoke distinctly, but beautifully. '*Paille*,' he cried; '*paille!*'

Still the farmer shook his head.

'This, you old frog, this!' roared the platoon sergeant, who had been scratching in the midden. He produced a dirty dung-clotted piece of straw.

'Ah, *paille!*' cried the farmer, rolling the *ll*s like a Welshman. He flung open the door and invited the men to help themselves from a well-stocked loft.

'What the hell's the use of learning French!' muttered Broadchalk as he tramped up the hill to the cottage set aside for B Company's mess.

Nobody in number eight had fallen out of the line of march, at any rate.

## IV

Until the regiment had marched into the village on that gusty morning Embry had seen little of the war, save the casualty list which was posted in the *mairie*. Broadchalk, looking back on those three glorious

weeks, when the sun smiled upon them in a temperate autumn friendliness, felt that they were the calmest in his experience. He was billeted with Trevor in a large cottage at the upper end of the village, just below the church. Two great beds towered up to the ceiling of their room, massive wooden contraptions to scale the heights of which a great jump was necessary, and a slow tortuous struggle over the edge, as a fat boy painfully achieves a circle over the horizontal bar. From his bed Broadchalk could pass a caressing hand over the surface of the ceiling, could peer over the edge at his slippers, which lay below like two black pebbles in a deep well. The scent of France, a concoction of rose leaves, sandal-wood and grenadine, pervaded the room: little pictures of the Virgin and the Saints glittered on the walls: medals struck for pilgrimages hung from silver chains. Now a new fragrance curled about the curtains and drifted idly through the small open window, the thin tenuous wisps of grey and blue smoke of Turkish cigarettes; incense it seemed, in homage to Our Lady of the Hundred Sorrows.

Papa was the chief peasant in the village. Each morning he sat before the cottage door, his old father and mother in two chairs at his side. Men would stop and talk to him, and then disappear into the precincts of the scullery. Broadchalk eyed these surreptitious visitors with suspicion—spies, or an illicit still! He strolled into the scullery casually when the conspirators were in conclave and the painful truth was borne to him, thrust upon him—Papa was a manufacturer of contraband tobacco and cigars! Three black spongy objects were thrust into his hand, freshly rolled from the leaf in his honour and gummed together with Papa's spittle, all under a vow of secrecy.

Broadchalk carried them to the mess and pressed one upon Ennis, who knew a lot about cigars. A match spluttered and a strong smell of gunpowder pervaded the room. Ennis hurriedly placed his squib in a bucket of water: Broadchalk smoked an inch for fear of hurting Papa's feelings: the Company Commander came into the room and reprimanded Private Brig for burning the potatoes.

Life was too easy in Embry. The sun shone unchecked, the peasant women carried in the harvest, the battalion marched briskly out to some hill, sat there until the Division had completed a momentous operation in which nobody seemed to be engaged except the staff, and then returned happily to its billets. There was a new spirit, a new recklessness. On one never-to-be-forgotten morning B Company set out to play by itself—an order had come through that men were to become accustomed to attacking with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets. They swept up a hill in four lines, chattering and chuckling at this freedom from the trammels of Field Service Regulations and the precautions of Aldershot. Their objective reached, they formed a densely packed firing line and poured round after round of rapid fire into a row of biscuit tins set up in the valley below. The whirl of the bullets added music to the shimmering mirage of the noonday sun: the tap, tap, tap, as the tins tottered and spun, seemed like some tom-tom marking the dance in an Indian bazaar: above the tins, crosslegged on a hillock, the sergeant-major sat like an idol, ready to ward off inquisitive cows: the peasant women bent over their gleaning, heedless of ricochet or the indifferent aim of Private Meadowes, who had a cast in his right eye.

In the evening Broadchalk, Trevor and Ennis

climbed to the top of the hills that overhung the village, for Embry nestled in a horseshoe of hills, planted with wheat and mustard, and covered with groves of hazel. They cracked the nuts in their teeth, and sat quietly watching the sunset, for each night there was a blaze of crimson glory in the west, a great furnace of fire that glowed over the crest of the downs, passing through the changes of yellow, gold, crimson, scarlet and purple: picking out a plough team, a farmhouse, a church and a wood, so that they grew into giant silhouettes cut from shining blocks of paper and pasted against the burning sky. It was then that Broadchalk most desired the companionship of Small: he wanted to show these things to Small, to ease his soul for a moment from the agony it was suffering in a concentration camp for junior officers among the Essex marshes. The battalion had contributed fifty supernumerary subalterns to that camp, but none of them had anything to offer to Small in the way of companionship. Broadchalk did not realise the significance of that camp, did not know that they were waiting, waiting until he and his friends should set out to storm that front line, waiting to fill the places of the fallen. To him the battalion was a unit, a unit that would remain unchanged and unscathed until its work in France was done. He had not troubled to meditate upon the individual: he had not considered the possibility of death and wounds, not for one or two, but for all. One belt from a German machine-gun could fill the company mess with six new faces, would mean little more than an order for six of those subalterns to pack their valises, leave Essex, and report to the battalion in the front line —somewhere in France. It was well that his imagination had not lingered on the obvious: if so he must have

wished for Small's presence, and that could only have been accomplished by the death or maiming of one of his friends.

As the month drew on a faint stir arose in the East, ran round the hills and filtered through the sunset—an intermittent groan of thundering, like the short sharp rumble of a chest of drawers being moved upon a wooden floor. Trevor sat up at the first sound of it, for he was lounging with Broadchalk and Ennis on a carpet of short turf beneath a hazel grove. 'There they go, the jolly fellows,' he said, with his inexplicable chuckle —for he had heard the noise before.

'Thunder,' murmured Broadchalk. 'I thought this weather couldn't last.'

Ennis laughed until his eyes filled with tears. 'Thunder!' he spluttered. 'Thunder! Listen to him.'

That rumble, which continued throughout the night until the noises of the day lulled it to silence, was the herald of a new activity. Strange motor-cars with staff officers drove through the village: the battalion caught glimpses of the newly-formed Guards Division: heard that they were part of the same army corps. Haking was to command, Bulldog Haking as an irreverent member of the Brigade Staff had called him. 'I pity Jerry if Haking gets his teeth into him,' their informant had said.

The mess had a lot to talk about that night—these divisional operations were just eyewash after all—smart crowd our intelligence, they had not only bluffed the Hun, they had bluffed us too.

A batch of subalterns were sent up to the line for a couple of days' sightseeing. B Company sent Ennis and the mess waited impatiently for his return. On the first evening Broadchalk strolled down to the farm where

his men were billeted, for he made a rule of visiting number eight before he turned in for the night. An indignant sergeant met him at the gate of the orchard. 'It's these 'ere apples, sir,' he explained. 'The farmer's a sport, and he comes out every morning and shakes a tree for us; and we're playing the game too. Nobody in number eight's pinching 'em: it's number six, coming back from the village at night: they climb through the 'edge—in broad daylight too, some of 'em. We chased a couple this afternoon. The farmer's cut up rough too. Won't give us no more apples and swears 'e'll see the Colonel—at least that's what Corporal 'Ammett says.'

Broadchalk took it all as a personal insult. 'Next man you find hanging about the orchard, make him fetch his rifle and pack and put him on guard over the tree for four hours.' He hurried back to the mess to find Trevor, who commanded number six.

Two days later the battalion, after lounging about half the morning, were told to carry on independently by companies. No orders had been received from Brigade! And in the evening the storm fell, for the Brigade had received no orders from the Division! A rampant Divisional General wanted to know why the hell Brigade hadn't sent an orderly, and Brigade rang up the Middlesex and wanted to know why the hell—and various officers in the Middlesex, both senior and junior, got very purple in the face and ran about shouting at one another—and in the end the whole Brigade were asking one another wildly: 'Who is this Broadchalk?'

The Colonel was very kind: he didn't tackle the offending Broadchalk: he talked to Morell, his Company Commander, and whether that conversation was conducted in laughter or tears is not on record. It was

unfortunate that the Brigade orderly—a Middlesex man—should have cycled past the orchard on his way to Divisional Headquarters while the watchful eye of Sergeant Piper of the Fusiliers, mindful of his apples, was peering round the corner of a cow-byre—doubly unfortunate that the orderly should have sighed for an apple to break the monotony of his journey—trebly unfortunate that Sergeant Piper should have emerged with rifle and equipment ready to hand—should have listened to no explanations, should have consulted his watch and criticised the military bearing of the Middlesex when placed in a position of trust.

Morell was as considerate as the Colonel: Broadchalk submitted the policy of the Mikado as a precedent and was gently reminded that he was in the British Army and not in Comic Opera. A cynic might have questioned the distinction: not so Broadchalk. He stammered and gulped: visions of those outraged apples played havoc in his brain with the crossed swords of an outraged brigadier: then they both sat down side by side in the hedgerow and laughed very loudly—and the Fusiliers said some gross things to the Middlesex.

## V

In those dog days sickness fell upon B Company. Broadchalk, who was orderly officer, toiled up the hill one broiling Sunday afternoon to the Château, where the battalion had its headquarters, in order to turn out the guard and inspect the meat. His head sang and his boots seemed to be weighted with lead. He yawned—decided to get the job over quickly and snatch an hour's sleep. He found an excited sentry eager to spout

the orders for the day. 'Hold up all motor-cars, especially a grey one with a man with a black beard inside: fire at the tyres if it doesn't halt: fire at the occupants if the first shot does not stop them.' Broadchalk's pulse quickened: here was war—spies with a vengeance! He looked up and down the road, sharing the sentry's hope that a grey car with a black-bearded passenger would burst into sight.

On a wooden table set on trestles great hunks of meat were being chopped up and divided into portions. The meat drove the black beard from Broadchalk's throbbing head: he swayed a little, and the quartermaster-sergeant looked at him anxiously.

'You'd better take twenty grains of quinine, sir, and get to bed,' he said.

Somehow Broadchalk stumbled out of the courtyard, pulled himself together to acknowledge the sentry's salute, and crept shivering back along the hedgerow to his billet. He found Trevor sitting in a small zinc bath blowing smoke rings.

'Study of a martial gent returning from the butcher!' laughed Trevor, as Broadchalk emptied his revolver and returned the bullets to their pouch.

'I'm not feeling very fit,' spluttered the martial gent. He dragged himself wearily up to his bed and fell into a stupor. He was wakened some hours after by Trevor, who tramped into the stone-paved room in company with the doctor. Broadchalk had a vague impression of thermometers and pulses, of the inevitable 'number 9' pill, of his servant helping Trevor to drag off his clothes. He protested feebly. 'I'm orderly officer,' he said, 'and there's a fellow with a black beard—' The doctor and Trevor exchanged glances; when they looked at the bed he had fallen into a stupor again.

He woke the next morning to find the doctor at his bedside with two tall stretcher-bearers. 'What's this mean?' he asked feebly. 'You're not going to send me away, doc.?' He clung to the bedclothes.

The doctor smiled. 'Only down the road. This room's too dark and stuffy: I'm going to put you in with Ennis: it's much cheerier there.'

They lifted him down on to the stretcher and carried him out into the sunlit village street. Papa, cap in hand, bowed and smiled, showing his white teeth and the irrepressible twinkle of his eyes. Broadchalk felt that he had a cigar behind his back which he would press upon him, talisman like, if the doctor's gaze should be relaxed. The old lady at the door, a basin of peas wedged in the folds of her large white apron, smiled tenderly at him from her chair, murmured the blessings that she said for him whenever he entered or left the cottage. They trudged down the hill—a solemn cortege, for the village was empty of its newly acquired soldiery. The villagers flocked to the doors and murmured in sympathy: at her gate Madame—in whose house the company messed and Morell and Ennis were billeted—stood awaiting the melancholy arrival of '*le petit officier avec la figure assez rouge.*'

They carried him up to a large room devoid of all fittings or furniture save one inexpressibly satisfactory *objet d'art*—the bridal bed: a soft luxurious couch of down, festooned with pink muslin curtains, tied with pink silk ribbon. A large window was open, through which the noises of the village climbed, laughing seductively. It was cool, fragrant, clean. Broadchalk smiled his thanks to the stretcher-bearers, two stalwarts from B Company—saw a suppressed grin steal across their faces, and watched them scuttle from the room.

He snuggled into the bed and pillows with a smirk of satisfaction, slowly closed his eyes, and as slowly opened them. Pinned to the curtains at the level of his eyes, cut from an *A.B.C.*—lurking in that remote village Heaven knows how—the advertisement for a seaside resort on the South Coast of England stared at him. 'Why not come to Worthing—it will make you feel better?'

Now Broadchalk had not yet recovered from an unexpressed but absorbing paroxysm of calf love, and the object of his passion—Broadchalk did not flatter himself that it was returned, for he was one of many irons—lived in that resort. He smiled, at the thought of her, at the thought of Worthing, but most of all at the thought of Ennis, whose hand had surely held the pin, just as his Irish mind and keen eyes had guided it. That small slip of paper was better than all the doctor's pills and thermometers: Broadchalk chuckled and fell asleep. He slept for ten hours and woke to find Ennis and Trevor by his bed.

'Did you ever see anything like it before?' asked Ennis. He broke into a jumble of gibberish which the uninitiated took for Irish, the uneducated for French, and Madame for the ravings of an excited Englishman. 'Talk about Beauty and the Beast! If she could see him now! If she could wake him now.'

Broadchalk's disease—as it got to be called—smote the mess of B Company man by man. By the time he was able to sit up in his bed, with a definite promise from the doctor to be allowed to appear on morning parade, Ennis and Trevor had already taken to their valises, and were stretched out in the oblivion of stupor. The bridal chamber had been converted into a sick-room, with Broadchalk the veteran in the bridal bed,

and Ennis and Trevor on the floor. Morell and Aubrey, the third subaltern, who had been running the company unaided, began to feel the symptoms: by the time that Broadchalk appeared on parade they were all laid by the heels.

It was his first experience of having sole charge of the company and he enjoyed it hugely. He took the men for a route march, a stirring affair. They swung along the white dusty roads, powdering the crops at the roadside as they went. The tramp of the men's feet, the ring of the pavé as they marched through a village, murmured accompaniment to the vision that was forming in Broadchalk's mind—that inevitable outcome of the battle that was about to be launched, the entry of the point of the British advance guard into Brussels, an advance guard formed by B Company, a point formed by No. 12 section of No. 8 platoon, with Second-Lieutenant Broadchalk in command—and attendance.

'Little quick for 'em, sir,' murmured the sergeant-major; his platoon sergeant, promoted shortly before they had sailed for France. Broadchalk grinned: he possibly had quickened the pace, but then old Bakewell couldn't see the Burgomaster waiting for them in the Market Square—Max, wasn't his name?—weeping into his handkerchief, while his sniffing wife groped in a basket for her largest rose to stick in the hat of the '*petit officier avec la figure assez rouge!*' who was thrusting his way through the throng of rejoicing citizens. But the *petit officier* had no eye for the blandishments of the Burgomaster's wife. His gaze was fixed on the little bunch of grey-clad men with spiked helmets who were scurrying out of the far entrance to the city, raising a dust as thick as any perpetrated by B Company

on that route march. He shook off an over-excited Bruxelloise and broke into a run.

'Company! Dismiss!' The sergeant-major's voice answered his bidding, sent his dream hurtling back into its box, to lie there until it should be taken out again in a new setting. The click of the men's heels as they turned, the muffled thump as they dropped their hands to their sides, brought him to a full awakening.

He returned to the mess, in a glow of joy after the pleasure of the morning. Private Brig, the mess cook, threw at him a glance not devoid of apprehension, for to Private Brig, a member of No. 8 platoon, there did not seem sufficient cause or impediment why the Broadchalk disease should not be laid at his door. Mrs. Morell had presented the mess with a set of aluminium cooking pots, which Private Brig had consigned, with only the barest rinsing in cold water to remove the sawdust, straight from the packing-case to the hob—and these pains and stupors had been shared only by those who had drawn first blood, or first stew, from these unscalded aluminium pots. But Broadchalk was too full of the excitement of being the only officer on the active list to worry about the cause of the others' absence. He drank their health in a tumbler of *vin ordinaire blanc*.

Before the end of lunch Ennis had appeared: Trevor came down to dinner: on the following morning Morell and Aubrey were fit enough once more to face Private Brig's machinations, and B Company breathed again.

## VI

The hive had now started to swarm. The motor-cars were doubled: strange staff-officers with brass hats haunted Battalion headquarters; large-scale maps,

covering the front from Bailleul to Arras, were served out to each officer, and with them smaller maps of the vast hinterland that stretched from the firing line to the frontiers of France and Belgium, and beyond. Broadchalk, at such times when he was not working, eating or sleeping, would stare at them perplexed. There had been so much to do in that year of training at home that he had no time to follow the course of the War. Names trickled through his brief study of the morning papers —generally confined to the Casualty Lists and the *Gazette*—and lingered in his memory; Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Gallipoli: they were places where the British had inflicted some signal defeat on the enemy and advanced. The casualty lists had swelled after them, and the *Times* had sometimes kindly printed a large scale map, with a thick black line and a dentated succession of black spots to show the extent of the advance. He had been forced to attend lectures where officers, back from the front, gave a semi-humorous, semi-depressing picture of the conditions in which a battle was fought or a line of trenches held in those first nine months of the war. He had carried away very little from those lectures, only an impression of a dirty monotonous existence in an ill-designed trench, where the snipers spent their time firing at the enemy's periscopes, and having their own shattered in return. In any case it would not have been worth studying, for were they not to put an end to it all in one glorious assault which would free the Allies from the shackles of trench warfare and drive the enemy into the open? Had they not spent a year deploying on the Sussex Downs and the bracken-strewn heather of Surrey and Hampshire: always attacking or throwing outposts forward in readiness for an attack? Broadchalk

drew more inspiration from the wash drawings of Captain Bruce Bairnsfather than from those lectures.

On Sunday afternoon the company marched up the village street, past the church and on to the main road leading to Fruges. It was hot and dusty: the road had the jaded aspect of an overheated Bank Holiday: one looked for swings and roundabouts, wasps settling on pineapple chunks, empty paper bags lying in ditches or swirled aloft in a back-eddy of grit, dust and spent matches. These ghosts of a lost cheerfulness, of Epping Forest or Hadley Wood, haunted the trim road: the men picked up the holiday mood: Coalfield, a circus clown in private life—found his best form and kept it.

On the march they passed a number of peasants, old men and women, dressed in their Sunday best—black satin for the most part, for few families had missed paying toll to that intermittent thunder in the East: here and there a young girl with a white blouse or red ribbon in her hair. Gnarled women, buxom, with red faces, fresh from their days of harvesting in the sunshine, strode by, smiling bashfully, shepherding their children, stopping to pull down the girls' frocks, straighten straggling stockings or ease the discomfort of the boys' overstarched collars. All of them carried gifts in baskets, for this was Embry's great day of the year, when all the neighbouring peasants flocked into the village to take part in a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady, perched on the hazel-topped hill above the church. Each bore gifts—fruit and wine—for their friends and relatives. Broadchalk had heard the scurry and bustle of preparations in his billet that afternoon, had seen Madame, resplendent in a high-necked satin blouse and grey tweed skirt, scrubbing her youngest son's mouth with spittle and dishcloth.

There were friendly greetings on both sides as the company marched by—chuckles by the irreverent, and an odd greeting here and there where one of those whose duties took him farther afield—signaller cyclists or scouts—recognised a face from one of the outlying farmhouses.

Beyond a bend they came to a sight which explained the ghosts and the unseen promptings from that past life where holidays, pomegranates and roundabouts were realities, and no vision. Drawn up in a line at the side of the road, their drivers lolling lazily against the bonnets, were four London motor omnibuses, advertisements and destination boards complete. The company paused and shivered, as a man stops in the desert before a mirage: then, as the realisation dawned upon them that these buses were waiting for them, the men swept forward in a quickened pace that bordered on the double.

A petulant A.S.C. officer strode up to them and spoke to Morell. Broadchalk's eyes were wide open with excitement, as he saw that one platoon was being posted to each bus. Were they going now, straight to the trenches, without their kit? Had the attack already started, without them, and were they to be the nail which drove it home? Had the Germans broken through, and did these four busloads alone represent Britain's hope of stemming the tide and preventing the field-grey from sweeping over the encircling hills of Embry? He dismissed the last explanation as absurd, glanced at his watch, and smartened up his platoon.

The fun had now commenced. Each platoon had started to master the art of loading a motor-bus with sixty men in under a minute. One up—one inside—and so alternately; twice they scrambled and jumped, while

each bus rocked and grunted to the tread of sixty pairs of iron-shod marching boots and the clatter of sixty rifles.

Morell was swift to seize any chance of whetting the men's keenness.

'I'll time you now,' he shouted. 'I shall blow my whistle, as a signal to the first man to get on. Platoon commanders will blow theirs as they jump on the step. Carry on by platoons.'

'Now then, Number Eight,' murmured Broadchalk.

'Stand by, Number Five,' said Morell. He put his whistle to his mouth.

Aubrey commanded Number Five, and made good time in spite of the handicap of starting. Trevor's platoon followed. Five and Six were rivals—a rivalry represented by contempt for one another rather than respect. They grinned at one another derisively, whereas when Six and Eight met it was with a slight smile and a toss on the head, as befitting equals.

Trevor was running no risks: he shepherded his men with a few short yelps and beat Aubrey by ten seconds.

Number Seven, whose subaltern was regimental bombing officer, were commanded by a sergeant: they were a good dozen seconds behind Aubrey. Ennis, who had commanded Number Eight before Broadchalk, strolled down to his old platoon.

'You've got fifty-seven seconds to win, Babe,' he whispered.

Broadchalk's red face was nearly purple: he had worked his men up to the same pitch of excitement.

'I'll do Trevor in the eye this time,' he answered.

'Stand by, Number Eight,' shouted Morell.

At the whistle Corporal Hammett leaped clear over the step, landed on the bottom stair and clattered to the

roof: and so they continued. It was not an episode in the training of the British Army: it was a tug-of-war, otter hunt and scrum six yards back rolled into one. Broadchalk had a good pair of lungs, and he sacrificed his dignity in their favour. Nor did he step on quietly in the wake of the last man: he joined in his run and jumped with him, blowing a shrill blast as the pair of them landed on the conductor's platform.

Morell's eyes were on his watch, and Ennis was no stickler for punctilio.

'Fifty-four seconds,' shouted Morell. 'Fall in.'

'Practice, Steve!' grinned one of the drivers. 'We're comin' back for yer to-morrer.'

The company marched back to billets in a buzz of excitement.

'It wasn't fair,' exclaimed Ennis to Trevor, referring to the recent contest. 'That last gust of wind blew the Babe on to the step.'

## VII

Those four motor-buses were the Mother Carey's chickens of the approaching storm. Their war-worn, businesslike appearance had imparted not a little of their atmosphere to B Company: it ceased to be a body of men in training for the front, it became part of the front, part of the British battle line, initiated by those four motor-buses, at one with those casual drivers who could count such an experience as part and parcel of their day's work. When the company had forgotten the amusement of the bus-loading competition it stiffened: it added a touch of seasoning to its veneer of experience: by a subtle introduction of the casual into its bearing it moved as if it had at least three months' trench war-

fare to its credit. 'We're coming back for yer to-morrer. 'Coming back'—as if those four buses had brought it from the lines for twenty-four hours' rest in the peaceful village of Embry.

Broadchalk, Ennis and Trevor, having flicked the dust of the main road from their boots with one of Private Brig's drying-cloths, walked through the village, crossed the brook below the church and made for the hill leading to the hazel-grove. As they reached the bottom of the track they met the head of a procession coming from the church, and stood aside to let it pass. First an acolyte bearing a crucifix, then two boys carrying censers, followed by a group of choristers; amongst them Broadchalk recognised Madame's younger son, from whose mouth all traces of lunch had been so carefully removed. In their wake, two by two, walked the women and old men of Embry and the villages around: a black, starched, awkward procession of peasants in uncomfortable clothes—smelling of soap superimposed on the fragrance of the dairy. In the forefront walked Madame, with her kindly inscrutable smile, as if a vision of her three sons in the trenches had been revealed to her, three ghosts begging her to carry their prayers to the top of the hill. Behind her, some six or seven couples distant, the old mother of Papa, leaning on Papa's arm, tottered bravely: was this not a *pèlerinage de la guerre* which none must miss? Last year she might have stayed in the chair at the cottage door, and next year too if Our Lady so willed it, but to-day—it seemed as if in her old ears those constant rumbles in the East had boomed their real significance.

Papa, spruce and gay, his grey hair brushed back to a point, a rose in his buttonhole, winked at Broadchalk —a faint twinkle of the eyelid implying a common bond

of secrecy and humorous appreciation. His eyelid fluttered like a hawk and then, as a hawk swoops, pointed straight to the breast pocket of his jacket. Broadchalk followed the gesture and noticed a slight, organ-shaped bulge, where four pipe-like squibs snuggled side by side, ready for distribution amongst those whom Papa should delight to honour when the ceremony was over and the sanctity of the scullery should be reached again.

In the rear of the procession marched the curé, with more acolytes, more crucifixes, more candles, more censers. Behind him, as if unwilling to identify themselves with the procession, and yet loath to leave it, moved a few straggling spectators, among them two men of B Company bareheaded—Irish Catholics—one of whom was to find his niche on a stretcher before seven days had elapsed.

The three officers saluted the priest and the crucifixes: so did the group of men who had been lounging about the crossroads when the procession had come into view, some of them standing to attention: some of them bareheaded, their civilian upbringing refusing to be suppressed in face of this challenge from the women and old men of Embry.

'Small would have liked that. I must tell him about it,' mused Broadchalk to himself, as they struck diagonally up the hill, leaving the track free to the pilgrims. 'Makes you feel like a trespasser, doesn't it,' he added aloud, with that quaint excited chuckle, representative of his child's appreciation of the queer things happening about him, as if life was one huge treat in which God, man, and nature had conspired to amuse him.

'They seem a bit louder this afternoon,' said Trevor,

straining his ears towards the East, where the murmur still echoed.

'They're just like eardrums. You know what I mean —when you contract the inside of your ears and get a short rumble with a crescendo in the middle. It's much more exciting when you've got a temperature!'

Ennis was unusually silent, striding ahead of them, covering the ground with steady relentless strides. The boys caught him up and chaffed him for his reticence. 'What's up with our ancient rustler?' asked Broadchalk.

'You forget I'm Irish,' Ennis answered with a short laugh. He looked back over his shoulder at the shrine, almost wistfully. They could see a glint of white as the curé passed through the door.

'But—you're a Protestant!' stammered Broadchalk. He took religion—by which he meant dogma—seriously.

'So they say,' replied Ennis.

## VIII

After mess that evening, when the candle-light flickered over the débris of tins, knives, plates, tumblers and a couple of bottles of *vin ordinaire*, they sat and smoked before settling down to a rubber of bridge. Morell, an old regular who had retired while still in his twenties shortly after the South African War, beamed down upon them. The candle-light gleamed on his bald head and red vein-lined cheeks. He was a jovial product of the days of quarter column and square: his mind viewed all war and manœuvres as they had been first stamped upon his memory in the veldt: he made every conceivable mistake when handling his company during field-training: he was hauled up on the mat by

the Colonel at every pow-wow: at Orders he was asked awkward questions to which he invariably gave the wrong answer: he conducted parade and field exercises in a state of mild exasperation. Off duty he was universally genial, in an habitual state of good humour and friendliness. He was too senior to make a real friendship with any of his subalterns, but his soul was filled with a loyalty that drew companionship wherever it beckoned. He had never been known to let a subordinate down by hint, word or gesture. He would take unmoved the taunts or censures of Colonel, Second in Command, or Adjutant after one of his boys had made some appalling blunder in direct contradiction to his orders. And afterwards he never complained or visited his wrath on the offending head. He knew that he was doing his best —even if it was a poor best—and that his boys were doing the same thing. And his loyalty was repaid. At pow-wows two or three subalterns would close up behind him and whisper the word that often pulled him out of the hole: in the field, as their knowledge and experience grew, they adjusted his ill-advised depositions on some grounds of expediency convincing enough to save his face before the men, and yet too obvious for him to be deceived. Unconsciously he must have conveyed some hint to officers and men of the dormant courage, common sense and dash which he was to display from the moment the company came under fire until he dodged round the corner of the Slag Heap on his last errand.

He beamed upon the faces in front of him with the same tolerant humour which had landed him in France in spite of his superiors' continual censure. On his right hand Ennis, iron-grey, large moustache, bright eyes, of a maturity that is never flustered: with the mind of a

bridge-player and Tom Hood rolled into one—destined to be the one survivor when B Company paraded a fortnight later—destined to fight continuously with the regiment for three years without scratch or mark. On his left hand Aubrey, energetic and impetuous: overburdened by O.T.C. efficiency, greatly treasuring his second star and his seniority in the regiment, for he had been gazetted in August 1914, whereas both Trevor and Broadchalk had enlisted in the ranks. Beyond Ennis, Broadchalk, indulging in his usual bickering and baiting of Aubrey, which continued incessantly until Aubrey remembered his second star and reminded those assembled of the fact. Then there would be a thump at the pit of their stomachs, a grunt from Morell—who went to bed as soon as mess was over—a gentle quip from Ennis to restore the situation, a laugh from Trevor, a general baiting of 'the Babe,' and bridge.

That evening they sat over the candles, for from the room beyond came the sounds of mirth, revelry and song—Madame was entertaining those friends who had visited Embry for the pilgrimage. The infection spread to the mess, and they passed round the whiskey again. The chatter in the next room was hushed, a voice intoned monotonously; a murmur of assent followed, and a clatter as chairs were pushed back and men and women rose to their feet. The silence and the voice had attracted the attention of the mess: their eyes were turned to the door when it opened and Madame entered, followed by her guests: her sister, her sister's *belle-sœur*, *M. le Maire*, and others.

Aubrey, who spoke idiomatic French, sifted the grain from the mangled chaff and interpreted. The guests edged into the room, until they had completed a

circle round the five men, who had risen from their seats at the round table.

'Will the English officers do them the honour to drink to the wellbeing and victory of the two great nations, England and France?'

Madame produced a basket from behind her containing a magnum of champagne. The mess sparkled.

She held it towards them, proudly, shyly.

'Damn it, it's all they've got: we can't take it,' said Morell. Aubrey interpreted.

'*Mais si, si, si. Voilà.*' She moved across the room and set it on top of the stove, in which a fire was burning. '*Voilà*,' she repeated.

Ennis, old toper, groaned: Morell chuckled; a murmur of assent went up from *Madame la sœur, Madame la belle-sœur de la sœur, et M. le Maire.*

'Breeck! Breeck!' cried Madame.

Private Brig, in whose dull ear this plot must have been previously planted or pounded, appeared with a sheepish grin and five glasses: Steele, Broadchalk's batman, hovered in the distance like a delighted fire-fly. Then five pairs of British eyes were directed upon the iniquity that was being perpetrated on the stove.

'It—it will go off!' cried Broadchalk, in a deep hollow voice, as if he gazed upon a spectre.

Madame swept past him, seized the bottle, deftly popped the cork and filled their glasses.

'*A la France*,' said Morell nervously.

'*A vos santés, messieurs*,' cried Madame.

'*A bas les Boches!*' growled *M. le Maire.*

'*A bas les Boches!*' they all thundered.

Ennis made his rapid speech in 'Irish.' Then they all drained a tumbler of bubbling, luke-warm syrup.

## IX

Next morning an order appeared instructing all officers to report with maps at the Château at half-past twelve. A light morning's work was carried out in consequence, in which Morell, who had inside information, fussed more than his wont; after parade he fluttered about the mess like a hen, satisfying himself that they were all present. He gave short shrift to any quip and glanced at his watch uneasily. Ten minutes before the time he marshalled them into the front garden, looked them over as one might inspect a batch of children before a party, and set out up the village street at a quick step. Brown, the commander of Number Seven, had abandoned his bombers and had rejoined the company for the occasion. Evidently something was in the wind. The courtyard of the Château was packed with officers. Brigade was there, General and all—also an important Colonel in a brass hat whom Broadchalk knew to be the G.S.O. 1 of the Division.

Their own Colonel started to speak in a quiet, serious voice, which had the power of electrifying men by its very cadence. There was something desperately inspiring about the Colonel—a brevet full Colonel, who knew his officers better than they thought. To Broadchalk he was the apotheosis of a deity-cum-headmaster. He had only once really spoken to him, some four months before when he was told that he had been chosen to go to France, and was to be attached to machine-guns in order to get over the difficulty of his juniority.

As the Colonel spoke, Broadchalk started slightly and gripped his ash stick: it was as if the first stray bullet had sped past his ear.

'Gentlemen, I will ask you to sit down and take out your maps. Colonel Campbell wishes to address you.' There was a rustle of maps, a creaking of belts, a rattle of sticks, a scraping of iron-shod boots on the sun-baked turf. Colonel Campbell, he with the brass hat, had an audience such as few preachers can have realised, and he rose to the occasion. He did not employ rhetoric: it was a plain statement of fact as far as the immediate future, and of stern confidence that turned the hopes of the remote future into a certainty already accomplished. He imparted this faith to his onlookers, formed from it an axiom by which their lives and actions were to be governed. That those hopes would be accomplished none of them doubted: it was a certainty, made doubly certain by the calm assurance and cold logic with which the Staff Officer stated his case. There was no question of eyewash in Broadchalk's unsuspecting mind; nor was there in Colonel Campbell's. History informs us that the Higher Command hoped at Loos for little more than was accomplished—but no thought of set-back, let alone failure, entered the minds of the men to whom was entrusted the pushing-home of the attack, nor of the men who commanded them. It was a powerful speech, for all its lack of emotion. It started with a reminder of the pounding and hammering of the enemy's trenches which had been proceeding for three weeks and was to last five days more: of vast reserves of ammunition: of superiority of guns: of a lack of resistance. 'The initial attack will be made on Saturday: it is your task to drive it home. You will be supported; you cannot be held up with that weight of ammunition. Each subaltern will advance with his own platoon as far forward as he can, without paying attention to the troops on his right and left. If he is held up he will lie down until the guns have

blasted his way clear. Platoons will leap-frog through platoons, so that the advance continues night and day' —the words burnt like fire into Broadchalk's brain. This was to be more than victory, it was to be a rout. He pictured a long khaki line pushing on remorsefully in the wake of a scuttling foe: stopping now and then for a breather while a mass of guns, moving in perfect line in the rear, crushed out the last traces of resistance. The Colonel was still speaking. 'The enemy has a prepared position running north and south through Douvrin. It will be taken: if you encounter any resistance wait until the guns have blown it to smithereens. After that nothing remains between you and your objective, the line Lille-Douai. By that time the pursuit will be taken over by the cavalry. In the meantime the French, with vast resources, will attack in the Champagne. Once the initial assault has been pushed home thirty-nine divisions will attack diagonally across the rear of the two northern German armies: I leave it to your imagination, gentlemen, to realise what the effect of such a movement must be.' After an exhortation to hold their tongues the officers were dismissed.[1]

Broadchalk walked away with a feeling of joyful ecstasy, as if he had just been confirmed by a bishop. Not only was the War going to end in a sweeping victory, but he was to be in at the finish! Number Eight were actually going to charge in the last attack—on Saturday morning!

[1] Colonel Campbell was, of course, interpreting 'with intelligence and conviction' Marshal Joffre's famous communiqué of September 14th, issued to all General Officers commanding Army Groups.

## X

On the following evening they marched out of Embry. No motor-buses were waiting to transport them bodily to the front line; nor was there any consolation for their absence. Instead an order was issued that there was to be no smoking and no singing—and as little talking as possible. Their destination still remained a secret from the junior officers, and so, in an atmosphere of suppressed mystery, the battalion marched out into the sunset.

All Embry turned out to bid them farewell: Madame with the shadow of a smile, or tears, playing over her lips: Papa, boisterous as ever, openly and unashamedly tossing his surreptitious wares to the men: the pretty girl at the *estaminet*, waving a last good-bye to those who had won her favours. As Broadchalk passed the cottage the old lady, who had sat so often shelling her peas in the doorway, tottered into the road: she seized his hand, murmuring a blessing, and pressed into it a small bronze medallion, souvenir of a pilgrimage she had made forty years ago to some district shrine, '*SS. Pierre et Paul: priez pour nous.*' Broadchalk slipped it into his breast pocket and later strung it next to his indentification disc, C.O.E. notwithstanding.

The church was swallowed up by its surrounding trees: there was a strange quiet, and sudden cold as the sun went down and left a grey clouded twilight that soon settled into darkness. The men were marching with a rare swing, in spite of the order that denied them rhythm. Mystery still hung over them: the realisation that the enemy might be watching, might be able to pick out the long parallel columns of three divisions as they, inch by inch, concentrated on that magic centre

from which the attack was to be launched. At the end of an hour they fell out for five minutes and sprawled in the hedges with a show of nonchalance.

The next hour was less happy: the battalion was now marching in the rear of the brigade: there were two lines of transport in front of them, and the presence of beasts in a column falls heavily on the men in the rear. A brigade on the march becomes ragged enough in broad daylight, with side drums, bugles and pipes to give the tune and instil spirit into the column. Now there was not so much as a mouth organ to bind them together. The transport spread out and closed up at the double, like an automatic concertina, and each contraction told on the men behind. By the end of the third hour the march had become a scurry, in which the infantry had taken up the concertina game, and were closing up continually in an effort to prevent these yawning gaps between details from becoming kilometres instead of yards. By the time the third five minutes' halt was ended the rear platoon of B Company had only just reached its place in the column. The men arrived panting, dishevelled and infuriated: there are few things more irritating than to speed on in pursuit of a receding body of disorganised men. The men could only grouse: a couple of songs would have pulled them together, a quiet cigarette during the hard-earned halt would have restored their humour: but no such solace was at hand. They were gradually churned into a rabble, advancing at a dog-trot shuffle, like men approaching the Twickenham ground before an International match, spurred on by a fear that the turnstiles will be closed before they have managed to squeeze through them.

Now men were limping: softened by the leisurely training at Embry, their feet would not stand up to the

wear and tear of that lamentable shuffle: long stretches of pavé jolted and bruised them: each stone seemed to sting them, to sear the soles of their swollen feet. And now odd men were seen in the hedges: sitting there miserable and dejected, their heads buried in their hands. Broadchalk watched his men anxiously: two were obviously about to go: a battalion orderly who should never have come to France, who had never been able to march five miles decently, and one of that miserable draft that had been inflicted upon them on the day they had sailed. He was a decent-looking boy, but there was something queer about him. The sergeant had remarked upon it before they had fallen in that evening. 'Don't seem to have much 'art for the thunderstorm, sir,' he had said, jerking his head towards the East. 'I've seen 'is like before. 'E'll be yellow by the time we get 'im there.' Judging from his blotched purplish face it seemed unlikely that they would ever get him there. 'Ain't been 'appy since 'e landed!'

Stragglers were getting more frequent. Broadchalk noticed one or two men from B Company. The orderly tottered into the ditch and collapsed with a groan: Maiden—the boy from the draft—was falling behind, disorganising the platoon even more. Broadchalk ran forward to get him up into his place. His eyes were staring and his teeth chattered: he seemed deaf to any command, oblivious of his surroundings. ''E knows damn well what's happening,' muttered a corporal. 'Get up, Maiden.'

'He looks as if he was going to peg out,' said Broadchalk.

Maiden's reply was to vomit, and a second private from Number Eight graced the ditch. Broadchalk fell out a corporal, gave him a written order to save his

skin from the A.P.M. and ordered him to collect all stragglers and march them in as best he could. The column shuffled on, ever lengthening, ever faster. The halts had ceased to count: any attempt at complete organisation, at a steady march as a unit heedless of the rabble in front, would have added five miles to the length of the line of march in as many minutes. Men were now carrying their mates' rifles: at first Broadchalk scuttled forward to check it, but he saw the grim determination to finish somehow on the faces of those who were being helped, and he shut an eye.

'Give me that rifle for a spell, Sanders,' he sang out; soon he was carrying two, at one time three. 'You see, I get a much better breakfast,' he explained to Trevor, who was carrying a rifle himself.

They wound through the sleeping town of Fruges. The moon had risen, was shining white on the plaster faces of the houses, so that they seemed to be eyes staring. 'Is this all you can manage: can't you do better than this?'

A few odd straggling members of the populace had collected at the crossroads, grouped round the cyclists who had been posted at each crossroad to make sure that the brigade took the right road.

'Come along: get that step going,' Broadchalk shouted: if he had had a drum he would have beaten it now, even if the whole German Staff could hear it. A timely halt in front enabled them to get together, and they started square again.

On, on; the road seemed endless: the men had even stopped grousing: they moved as silently as any staff officer could have wished. It was nearly six hours since they had left Embry, when suddenly there was a strange cry from the head of Number Eight. 'God bless 'is

pretty eyes!' It was the company-sergeant-major who gave that rally, for he had fallen back to march a bit with his old platoon—and he was as tired as any of them.

The pretty eyes smiled back at him from the road: they belonged to the quarter-master-sergeant; their beauty had hitherto escaped comment, but their presence could only mean that the company had reached its billets.

No pipes, drums or tabors, no hunting horn, no siren ever filled the hearts of men and stiffened their guts as that cry from Sergeant-Major Bakewell. Men woke from their stupor, stretched out their hands for their rifles: shuffled into their places and marched in with a swing.

Morell watched them go past. 'Officers will march their platoons to their billets and dismiss them.' An orderly attached himself to Broadchalk and led the way to a large wooden shed on the outskirts of the village.

Broadchalk could not trust himself to speak: there was a lump in his throat—a mixture of rage and shame: he dared not even ask the name of the village.

The men moved into line with a snap, dressed and stood at attention; they might have been drilling on the front at Brighton.

Broadchalk faced them for a moment: looked slowly from left to right along the line. 'I'm bloody well ashamed of you!' he shouted. He had never used an oath on parade before: it helped him.

At the crossroads he found his valise, where it had been dumped from a limber. There was no sign of his batman, so he hoisted it on to his own shoulders and staggered down the road to the schoolroom, where he

and Trevor had been billeted. Trevor met him on the way and gave him a hand. Neither of them spoke much that night.

## XI

Beaumetz-les-Aire straggled along the main road, with a lane branching off at right angles where the schoolroom lay.

The mess were not in a good temper when they met at a late breakfast. Morell was justifiably angry, and he pitched into his subalterns accordingly; Ennis, who had been battalion billeting officer and had missed the march, kept a discreet silence: Aubrey, Trevor, and Broadchalk sat with their ears tingling.

The mess had been established in the village general shop, where Morell, Ennis and Aubrey were billeted. From time to time villagers would stroll in, largely out of curiosity, to exchange the time of day with the sun-bonneted old dame who, hunched up like the sheep in *Through the Looking Glass*, plied her knitting needles behind the counter. A young girl washed the tiled floor: the smell of grenadine pervaded every nook and cranny.

It was a blazing hot day. From the road outside there came a continuous creak of limber wheels, as the divisional trains of the Army Corps moved up and on to the next billeting area. A battalion of Guards marched through: then a detachment of cyclists. Corporal Hammett had reported early that morning with his stragglers.

Battalion orders had a good deal to say about march discipline, and above all of the fact that several of the men had fallen out and cadged a lift or deposited their kits on the limbers.

'Anybody would think you fellows were a beaten army on the run,' growled Morell. 'You're supposed to be fresh troops marching into the attack.'

He held Company Orders and came down on the delinquents as heavily as he could; two of them he sent up to the Colonel. Broadchalk, who was Company Orderly Officer for the week, stood solemnly by his side, nursing the crime sheets. It was past midday before he and Trevor were able to slip away and air their grievances while exploring the village.

The guns were now booming incessantly in a low angry growl: at Embry they had only heard the individual groans of the heavy pieces: now there was a constant drone as the whole line opened out in that four days' constant bombardment, the biggest artillery effort that the British had made so far.

The men sat in groups in a field behind the barn: some slept, others tended their feet. The N.C.O.'s sat in a ring smoking, discussing the events of that deplorable march. They jumped to their feet as Broadchalk approached.

'It will be different to-night, sir,' said one of them. 'I reckon those motor-buses were at the bottom of it.'

'It's got to be,' answered Broadchalk curtly.

An aeroplane flew over and they all took cover: it was a British plane circling over the Corps Area to make sure that all troops were hidden from any scout that might manage to slip through from the enemy lines.

The corporal proved to be correct in his forecast: the march *was* different. Odd men fell out, Broadchalk again lost Maiden and the orderly, the pace was quicker than it should have been—unavoidable in the rear of a column five miles long—but there was swing

and rhythm. Ennis joined Broadchalk in the rear of B Company. If the march to Beaumetz-les-Aire had seemed long, the march to Busnes seemed interminable. The route led up and around through open fields of stubble; a bright moon lit up the white road until it glistened like a river. They passed through a couple of silent villages; the front line was nearer now: British troops marching at night were the rule rather than the exception, for regiments from the line in front of Armentières and La Bassée were sent back regularly to rest in those quiet villages, so that the passage of the Brigade attracted little attention. They marched on and on, stopping for their five minutes' halt, advancing once more for another hour's mechanical jog.

A long stretch of pavé between an avenue of poplars marked the crest of a ridge: in front stretched a long pall of dull red, breathing promises of raids, rockets and patrols. Both sides were warming up to the business in hand, and the guns boomed more and more viciously. There was a touch of frost in the air which added keenness to the march.

'You wouldn't believe they were the same crowd,' said Broadchalk to Ennis. Ennis was too engrossed in warding off the attentions of an ammunition mule to answer.

Morell, on his blue roan, patrolled the company unceasingly, snapping out a word here and there; the N.C.O.'s kept their sections together, with a constant 'left, right, left': in the moonlight the men's faces showed grim and determined: this was marching for marching's sake.

Morell rode for a time with Broadchalk and Ennis: he had recovered his temper and, as usual, gave the impression of having forgotten the hard words in the

general shop. It was his way, to have a thing out and forget all about it: he never nagged, nor threw up old crimes in a man's teeth; the company were making good in consequence.

As at Beaumetz, their destination was marked by the appearance of the quarter-master-sergeant, carrying a hurricane lantern, for the moon was overclouded. They marched into Busnes under the eye of the Brigadier and the Colonel, separated by companies, and proceeded to their billets.

Broadchalk led his platoon half a mile beyond the town, and turned into a muddy lane off the main road. A hundred yards down the lane he halted at a large farm, where he left his men. Farther on there was a second farmhouse, even larger, into which the quarter-master-sergeant turned, still swinging his lantern. Broadchalk had an impression, in a fitful glimpse of the moon, of a large square of white buildings like a college quadrangle. In the far corner they found a door locked and bolted, against which the quarter-master beat with his stick, shouting through the keyhole the cosmopolitan 'Offizier,' which passed muster among the four nations on the west front. For a minute or more they waited, until finally they heard somebody fumbling at the chain inside: then with a gruff 'Good-night' the sergeant departed with his lantern.

A tall peasant, holding a lighted candle, grunted at the sight of his visitor, muttered a sentence which Broadchalk could not catch, and led the way through a succession of long, pitch-dark rooms. The clatter of his wooden clogs on the stone floors, combined with the tramp of Broadchalk's nailed boots, seemed the prelude to some execution in a secret vault of a mediæval castle. Broadchalk tried to pick up some sense of

direction, but the march seemed endless, nor was there any hint of anyone else being in the building except himself and his morose host. At length, when they had apparently reached the innermost bowels of a cathedral crypt, the man stopped before a small door, unlatched it and went in. It was a small bedroom, neat and clean, with a comfortable bed, a chair, and a rug on the floor. The window, which occupied the greater part of one wall, was open and guarded by strong iron bars let into the sill.

The peasant lit a candle on a small table by the bed, grunted once again, and clattered noisily away, latching the door behind him.

Broadchalk sat on the bed, taking stock of his surroundings. They were more remote than he cared: buried deep in the interior of a house large enough to hold a hundred men, with no access save through those interminable passages and empty rooms: separated by a couple of hundred yards from his platoon, by three-quarters of a mile, as far as he knew, from the rest of the company—it was not inspiring! He peered out of the window, and discerned the slow-moving form and listened to the crunch of a cow grazing in the meadow beyond. The barred windows prevented any hope of escape: in the meantime there might be an alarm, sudden orders to move up to the front line: they were a mere dozen kilometres distant now: the guns were thundering continuously, in a steady succession of crescendos and crashes. Who would remember him if the company got orders to march off? Not the quarter-master-sergeant: he would be too busy. He decided to investigate, to get the way to the door clear in his mind at any rate, and, taking up his candle, quietly left his room, or cell as it seemed to him.

The crypt through which he had been led proved to be three large, stone-flagged rooms, unfurnished, and two small connecting passages: beyond this was the front door which opened into a small corridor, separating the wing in which his room lay from the main portion of the farmhouse. At the end of the corridor he saw a door beneath which a light shone, and beyond the door was the sound of several voices, and men's laughter. He tapped slightly on it, raised the latch, and peered inside. Seated at the table, regaling the farmer and his wife with a stirring description of their last long spell in the trenches, were Aubrey and Trevor. Ennis, twitching his forehead in a way he had when amused, was delivering his Irish oration into the delighted ears of the farmer's daughter; the morose peasant proved to be a sturdy young reservist, enjoying a spell of leave from the front line and giving a hand with the last of the harvest. The farmer's daughter, a pretty girl with a mop of fair curls, chuckled with delight at Broadchalk's appearance, as if he had been some new form of mechanical Teddy Bear. '*Mais qu'il est jeune!*' She dropped *mon lieutenant* the semblance of a curtsey and handed him a glass of hot coffee.

'Pleasant sort of billet after a spell of the trenches,' said Ennis.

'Why are you stuffing them up with this rubbish?' asked Broadchalk.

Trevor was floundering through a description of the exact time they had been relieved that night. Aubrey, who was taking the coming battle mightily seriously, scowled at Broadchalk. 'They may be spies,' he said. 'It's not their business who we are—besides why should we let on that we have never been in the front line yet.'

Ennis smiled at this confession of vanity. 'They won't believe that now Broadchalk has turned up. They'll think we're the Boys' Brigade.'

'Sherr-wood Forr-r-est-aires,' roared the farmer's daughter to Trevor.

'Fusils-bang-bang,' replied Ennis, aiming one right one left with an imaginary gun.

Aubrey, who spoke French well, explained that he was an archer by trade, while Trevor, always polite on such an occasion, slowly pounded his way through that description once more for the benefit of the farmer's wife.

A clatter in the corridor announced the arrival of three batmen with three Wolseley valises: Ennis rose to return to the town and the party separated for the night.

## XII

Broadchalk had a double awakening on the next morning; simultaneously with the entry of his batman the cow pushed her nose through the bars and added a protesting low to the rumble of the guns. He tumbled out of bed, sluiced himself in a bucket of water, scraped off the fluff that had accumulated in the cleft of his chin, and hurriedly pulled on his clothes. He was Battalion Orderly Officer that morning, and in less than ten minutes he was striding briskly along the lane towards the town.

There was considerable bustle at the crossroads, which formed the central place of the small town. Orderlies on bicycles, staff cars, empty limbers: groups of men here and there: it presented a good picture of a village a few kilometres behind the front. For a short

time at the beginning of the War it had been overrun by the German patrols—Uhlans had stabled at the farm where Broadchalk was billeted—but only a few damaged houses here and there showed where a long-range shell had found its mark. The villagers were moving quietly about their business; a couple of *poilus* saluted him as he stepped along the main street to the house where the battalion had planted its head-quarters. He turned out the guard and inspected the one prisoner, Coalfield, whose use of the circus vernacular was so deeply engrained that he was physically incapable of addressing his non-commissioned officers with discretion. He sat on the ground, an oddly shaped, queer, dilapidated figure, minus his boots, gazing at Broadchalk with a silent dog-like plea for compassion that he dare not put into words for fear of committing an even more heinous offence.

If at any time Broadchalk had attempted to take toll of the moment when he felt most fit he would have plunged for that early morning in Busnes, when, conscious of the fact that the rest of the battalion slept after two gruelling night marches, he stood in the middle of the town, snuffing the glories of a late September morning, while a watery sun was rising above the copper-tinted woods, and a promise of frost bit into his cheek as the early breeze gambolled pleasantly along the cobbled street.

He turned to find the Adjutant and the Colonel behind him. He saluted and smiled; at the Colonel because he held him in awe and respect above all other men; at the Adjutant, from whom he had in the past received his full share of snubs, because he could not find it in him to feel anything but charitable at such a moment of blissful intoxication. The Colonel seemed to sense his enthu-

siasm—it must have been dripping from him—for he returned the smile with a twinkle that hinted at sympathy. Broadchalk reported all present, and set out in search of his breakfast. 'Keen little devil that,' he heard the Colonel murmur, and the Adjutant seemed grudgingly to agree.

Broadchalk's duties kept him on the move most of the morning, and midday found him on his way to turn out and inspect the inlying picket. This was a Divisional institution dating back from the early days of Embry. Each day one platoon from each battalion took over the duty: it lay in its billet for twenty-four hours fully equipped, its rifles piled ready for immediate action. Its platoon commander, also fully equipped, ate and slept with it, unless he should happen to be on special duty. It was supposed to be ready for instant action, to serve as a rallying point in case of emergency, and in consequence mounted its own armed sentries who performed all the duties of a battalion guard; as such therefore it was inspected twice by the Orderly Officer and once by the Captain of the day.

B Company had taken their picket duty seriously: Broadchalk had bivouacked with his men in the friendly orchard, had filled his mess-tin from their dixie: had slept with his corporals in a pile of hay under the shelter of a lean-to shed, and had even placed his lips to a stone jar of rum which Sergeant Piper had produced miraculously from thin air just as they were turning in for the night.

His indignation therefore at finding one sentry, unsupported by a guard, standing at ease by a gate at the field, with no conception of his duties, knew no bounds: his sense of the romantic was injured and shocked: he went purple in the face and rushed into the field. On

the ground were a number of kits: a few men in shirt sleeves were talking and smoking: one was cleaning his rifle, another, boots off, was dabbing at his toes. They jumped to their feet at Broadchalk's appearance and gazed at him with surprise.

'Who's in command here?' he shouted.

A corporal, who had hastily snatched at his jacket, ran up, buttoning his collar. 'Sergeant Madden, sir.'

'Who's platoon is this?' He named the signalling officer, who was attached to Brigade.

'Fetch Sergeant Madden.'

The sergeant appeared, also in his shirt sleeves: two minutes later the platoon were being inspected in full kit and equipment.

As Broadchalk left the field he saw Hands, the company commander, on his way to Battalion Orders and crossed over to him.

'I had better warn you,' he said, 'I've just put that Sergeant Madden under arrest and I'm going to haul him up before the Colonel now.'

'Thank God,' replied Hands. 'I've been trying to get that fellow's stripes for the last three months, but he's never given me a chance.'

Madden was relegated to the ranks at his own request, and Broadchalk, to his surprise, found himself popular with A Company's mess.

For the whole of that day the men lay under cover, paddling their feet in a brook: cleaning kit, writing letters, sleeping. They could see the aeroplanes darting backwards and forwards over the lines like humming bees. The guns roared louder and louder, more details were pressing through on their way to the front, despatch riders on motor-cycles spluttered noisily through the village.

In the intervals of inspecting their billets the subalterns played bridge. It was nearly midnight by the time Broadchalk had reported all present to the Colonel and turned out the guard for the second time. On his way to his billet he inspected his friends of the inlying picket—they were very much on the spot and turned out as if they were on barrack square. He was met by a cheerful sergeant, recently promoted, and the bearing of the men did not disguise the fact that they too thanked God that they were not going to set out on the attack under the indifferent leadership of Sergeant Madden.

Broadchalk fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

## XIII

Broadchalk, having prepared, examined and weighed the sentence with scrupulous care beforehand, sought out the farmer's wife, whom he found—an hour after daybreak—stirring clothes in a tub with a copper-stick.

'*Voulez-vous me donner quelque chose dans laquelle je peux avoir un bain?*' he said, with strong emphasis on the '*donn*,' the '*quelle*' and the '*bain*.'

'*Monsieur*,' murmured the farmer's wife, very quietly: she was a pleasant capable woman of about forty-five.

Broadchalk repeated his request with precision. Then, as he saw that he had failed, he took in his pyjamas, gum-boots and British Warm with a comprehensive wave of his hand. '*Bain, bain, bain*,' he added.

'*Bang*,' repeated his batman sadly, making the motions of sponge-squeezing over his head.

'*Pas compris*,' answered the farmer's wife decidedly.

'*Monsieur demande?*' She had put down her copper-stick and glanced at Broadchalk in dismay, her face showing all the anguish that one feels when confronted with a dumb creature that can find no words to indicate its pain, but can only wag a tail sadly, craving sympathy and lamenting the stupidity of its master.

'*Voulez-vous me donner quelque chose?*'—began Broadchalk for the third time. A rattle of tins interrupted him: his batman, on his knees before the sink, was dragging from its seclusion a zinc tub.

'Ah, *bain!*' cried the woman. '*Grand plaisir.*' She placed it outside the doorway in the sun, in full view of the copper where she was working. She ladled into it a liberal allowance of warm soapy water. '*Continuez*,' she cried.

Broadchalk eyed the bath askance; then he dragged it a little to the right, only to find himself in front of the kitchen window, where the curly-haired daughter was sipping her coffee; then he dragged it to the left, clear of the view from the door, and bidding his batman stand by ready to screen him with a towel, slipped off his clothes.

He had scarcely sat in the water, his feet overlapping the edges of the tub, before Madame appeared, with an armful of clothes ready to hang on the line. The batman leapt into the breach: Madame smiled: to his surprise Broadchalk watched a couple of his own shirts and some socks being pinned to the cord. 'Hang on to that towel, Steele,' he said. 'She'll want to wash that next!'

The farmer's daughter came cheerfully into the sun and wished him '*Bonjour*': her hair sparkled: even the cow moved slowly towards the scullery door as if attracted by the glitter.

'Damn these women,' groaned Broadchalk.

A roar of laughter behind him announced the appearance of Trevor. 'After you with that bath,' he said.

'You can have it for keeps,' yelped Broadchalk. He wrapped the towel round him and fled incontinently.

'Tip the water out and take it into my room,' said Trevor to Steele. '*Bonjour, mademoiselle.*'

'*Bonjour, mon lieutenant. C'est un drôle, ça.*' She jerked her curls in the direction of Broadchalk's room and returned to the kitchen with a ripple of laughter.

## XIV

At Battalion Orders there was further flourishing of maps. The Colonel reiterated the plan of battle as expounded by Campbell: he shook his head significantly at the thought of the damage about to be wrought by thirty-nine French divisions, attacking diagonally across the enemy's left rear. He exhibited a number of sketches of landmarks in the Corps' tumultuous advance —Lone Tree, Tower Bridge, Hill 70, Chalk Pit Wood: the subalterns picked them out on their large scale maps and memorised them, as a tripper memorises beforehand the wonders of the countryside that he is about to visit. Those charcoal sketches seemed to add years to their military experience: they discussed Lone Tree, Tower Bridge and Hill 70 as a man will talk about the Surrey, the Elephant and the Oval. To Broadchalk these mighty places seemed distressingly close to the present front line; he would have been more inspired by a photograph of the cathedral at Douai, the King's palace in Brussels or the bridge across the Rhine at Cologne. The guns also seemed, by their grunts and groans, to register an objection against such pessimism: Lone Tree, Tower Bridge indeed!

Aubrey had carefully drawn all the trench details into his large scale map, choosing such squares as were mentioned in the Colonel's harangue: Broadchalk copied them over his shoulder. There were a number of Fosses that disturbed him: so far he had connected them with ditches and that noble road which drives over the Cotswolds: *Fosse Numéro* 5, *Fosse Numéro* 8: they suggested gigantic ramparts thrown up by the Gauls in Caesar's path, to be stormed in the first rush to-morrow morning, if the guns had not already blown them sky-high. He confided his doubts to Ennis as they returned to the company mess. Ennis smiled at him cryptically: 'I wish I were fifteen years younger,' he answered.

In the afternoon they inspected their platoons. Each subaltern had been ordered to explain the situation to his men, to instil into them the Campbell spirit: to remind them that it was to be a soldier's battle, each man for himself, but in the direction of the enemy, *bien entendu.*

Broadchalk composed his speech as he strode—it was almost a run—along the lane towards the field in which Number Eight were disporting themselves in a manner dear to a soldier's heart—lying outstretched on a green sward of grass, in brilliant sunshine, watching the specks of aeroplanes hover and circle, computing the nearness of the pursuing puff-balls blown at them by the enemy's anti-aircraft guns. There was a clump of young trees about the gate, under which the men fell in. 'You can sit down and smoke,' said Broadchalk, clambering to the top of the gate and filling his pipe.

He had had many informal discussions with his men, and they liked it—or seemed to; asked questions, and the results had appeared in the efficiency of sentry

groups and patrols in those operations on the Sussex downs. Broadchalk was mouthing the opening speech of his harangue when an exclamation from his sergeant sent all eyes scouring the horizon. 'Zeppelin, sir!' It moved among the aeroplanes like a slow uncertain dachshund threading its way through a swarm of hornets. The sun flashed on its grey-yellow sides: the puff-balls danced about its nose and tail: for a couple of minutes it forged along: then turned back towards its own country, showing a pin-point only of tail, soon to be swallowed up in the heat haze.

Broadchalk's fine speech slipped away into the limbo of its conception; for the first time since he had walked on parade he felt shy: for the first time he realised that young as he might be, he was an old man compared to those children sitting on the grass. 'We're going that way too, to-morrow,' he said. 'There's going to be a hell of a scrap: the biggest battle in the world's history: and we're to take part in it. We've got to push slap ahead as fast as we can on our own, and we're not to worry about Number Six or Number Seven; we've only got to keep our eyes skinned for Huns. They'll be going so fast that we shall be lucky if we get a sight of them.' There was a general chuckle, not of derision but delight. 'I shall probably make a lot of mistakes, but I know you will help me out if I do—and if you make mistakes I'll try to help you out. If I go under I hope you will remember me to the Huns when you catch them up: if any of you go under we'll remember you when the time comes. That's all. Good luck to you!'

It was not in any sense the product of the barrack-square, that speech: it would not pass as a model in a text-book for young officers: it was an expression of friendship. Until that moment Broadchalk had not

realised that the lives of those men might well rest on a decision of his; now he saw clearly that within twenty-four hours the whole sixty of them would be dependent upon him: it was their friendship then that he coveted, now that differences were to be levelled, and they were to stand together, man with man, as well as officer with man.

He smiled nervously at them, wondering if they were laughing at him in their hearts. The next moment he had scrambled off the gate and was hurrying down the lane with a lump in his throat and the echo of their second cheer in his ears.

It was certainly not in the strict tradition of barrack-square: but for that beastly Zeppelin he might have injected them with Campbelline, inflamed them with blood lust, sent every finger twitching to the bayonet hilt.

He caught up Trevor in the lane. 'Well, that's that!' Judging from Trevor's silence during the walk Broad-chalk gathered that his 'that' had coincided very closely with his own. Farther on they passed Number Five's bivouac. The platoon were standing at ease: in front of them Aubrey stood before a table, on which a number of maps were spread. His N.C.O.'s were bending closely over the maps, and snatches of Aubrey's harangue were carried over the hedge by the evening breeze. 'Line running due north and south through Douvrin—sit down and wait for the artillery—Thirty-nine divisions.'

They played cut-throat with Ennis until he turned up at the mess half an hour later.

## XV

The command to move came very suddenly. Broadchalk was playing a hand of two diamonds when Morell rushed into the room, decidedly fussed. 'What are you fellows doing? The battalion parades in half an hour. Get your men fallen in at once.'

They rose to their feet and smiled at one another. Their training had ceased from that moment and the real thing had begun at last: twelve months' temper was to be tested in a machine of unknown capacity—but at that moment they were merely amused at Morell's tetchiness, as if he expected them to have divined the orders which he had only received from the Adjutant five minutes before at a special meeting of company commanders. Broadchalk swept up the cards and stuffed them into his breast pocket: he took the two brown cloth-covered loose-leaf files of crime sheets and slipped them into his large side pockets; he gobbled down the remains of his whiskey and picked up his ash stick and soft trench cap from the table—for the steel helmet had not yet inflicted its burden on the sorely weighted infantry.

'You fellows may not see your valises again for a week, so you had better put a change into your packs,' said Morell.

The news had already reached the company through the sergeant-major. Broadchalk found his batman waiting for him with his pack ready. He paraded and inspected his men as if they were on a field day: there might have been no harangue, no hasty descent from that five-barred gate. In half an hour, as Morell had predicted, the battalion had set out on the last march to the front line.

It was B Company's turn to lead the column and, to Broadchalk's joy, Morell put Number Eight in front. They moved along with the slow swinging stride of heavily laden men; first Morell on his blue roan: then Broadchalk, Corporal Hammett and the company-sergeant-major.

'Just as well Number Eight's in front with them Germans about,' said Bakewell. with a grin. 'Easier in front, sir, ain't it? Mr. Aubrey will be getting back something of what he was giving you.'

Broadchalk smiled: Aubrey's disgust at the reversal of the order of platoons had not been disguised.

They were just clear of the town and were marching at ease when the Colonel rode up and started a long conversation with Morell. Broadchalk heard his own name mentioned once or twice, and a reference to a horse. At last the Colonel called him and he doubled forward. 'I'm a bit anxious about the Middlesex,' said the Colonel. 'They've got their second line transport in the column, and it's contrary to orders. I'm afraid that if Wiggins—the Brigade transport officer—discovers it he may turn it out of the column, and then we shall run the risk of losing touch with the rest of the Brigade. I want you to march between their first and second lines, and send back word if Wiggins takes any action. That will prevent us from falling out. You can catch them up easily enough.'

It was a job after Broadchalk's heart: it added a touch of responsibility to his part in that last march to the line. He pressed on determinedly in the wake of the battalion in front of them, anxious that the threatened action should not take place before he had reached his appointed position. The fact that he was to trudge along between two limbers drawn by mules did not

worry him in the least, nor did he wish for a horse: only he regretted the loss of his men's companionship.

He found his quarry, slipped into the line, and marched briskly behind a limber. The transport officer asked him his business and accepted his explanation with a shrug of his shoulders: then he rode forward again, leaving Broadchalk to his own devices.

It was not wildly exciting. The transport, strung out in the rear of a column of infantry, was already busy at the concertina game. The wheels kept up a continuous clatter on the cobbled road, or whined and grunted whenever they came to soft churned-up metal: uphill they lost ground, and made up for it by breaking into a trot as soon as they had crowned the slope. Broadchalk kept pace with them, determined that they should not shake him off or defeat his object. The march developed into a race in which he forged ahead at full speed, sometimes almost approaching a double: he seemed to be catching a succession of railway trains, and he got no rest at the halts, for the transport spent the respite in reaching their place in the column.

As the crow flies the march was less than ten miles, but the roads wound over undulating, open country, sweeping to the right here to avoid a slope, climbing there, descending into a low valley, winding through a scattered hamlet, drawing ever nearer and nearer to Béthune, and the magic furnace that burnt beyond it. For four hours Broadchalk strode on, speaking to no man, snuffing in the cool autumn air.

It was a clear night: the stars spangled the grey pall above him: a cold bright moon had risen, lighting up their khaki so that they seemed to be snowmen slipping over a path of gleaming ice. Ahead there was a bright red glow, stretching in an arc across the horizon, pro-

mising a glimpse of some mighty city. Broadchalk knew that when that glimpse came his task was ended, and it burst on him suddenly, like the drawing of the curtain in a theatre.

They had been winding up a long hill, which seemed like all other hills that they had climbed. Each side of the road were tall hedges—beyond were long stretches of stubble, sloping up to the skyline. They were marching through the saddle thus formed when suddenly, turning to the right at a bend on the crest, they saw their objective before them.

Broadchalk turned quickly into the side of the road and peered over the hedge. Before him, in a semi-circle, so that the column seemed to have walked into a trap, lay the firing line, a red-hot gash of thunderbolt. The guns were roaring their last six hours' thunder: rockets and Véry lights coiled into the air like streamers, burst and turned great areas of darkness into daylight: houses and farms blazed in flames. In that gash men were waiting: Broadchalk could feel their tension and quivered to it. On the one side men, unscathed surely, supported by that continuous roar of gunfire, waiting to pour across and occupy the scarred fragments of trenches opposing them—he could see the shells bursting into the enemy's lines, feel the inexorable determination that was waiting for the leash to be slipped. On the other side—it was hard to realise that anyone could be living on that other side. Broadchalk had not yet learnt to consider the enemy as a collection of individuals—to him it was a grey menace that sprawled across his front, that even now was writhing in its last gasp, blown to pieces by that shattering force of metal and explosive: lit up by the rockets and exposed mangled and naked to have its last limbs hacked

from its body by the men whose eyes, changed into rockets by some Djinn, darted up into the sky and stared down upon it with the cold, relentless, all-seeing stare of a bogey in a child's nightmare.

He stood, watching that mighty belt of waiting men, fashioning dreams and conjuring visions, until the transport had passed by. For a few minutes the road was empty: he seemed to be the solitary spectator of that writhing struggle, as a hunter, pressing on alone into virgin jungle, might find two primitive beasts at war and stop enthralled to watch.

The minutes of his solitude piled slowly one upon another until the solitude inspired him with a terrible dread that after all he had failed in his job. Where was the battalion? Had he marched in the wrong place? Had Wiggins done his worst unheeded? Was the battalion even now miles from its objective, hopelessly lost? Would that great line be pushed forward without them?

He felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead, looked back wildly with an agitation almost approaching tears. He turned and started to run back towards the bend in the road, but a clatter of hoofs filled him with hope. To his relief the Colonel appeared riding alone, his shoulders hunched, his chin thrust a little forward, a stern figure that always seemed to be thinking, thinking. He reported all correct.

'Right, Broadchalk; thank you. You can rejoin your company.'

Broadchalk did not wait until they caught him up: he turned and walked briskly down the hill until he met them; then slipped quietly into his place in the column. The men were in first-class fettle, and as they rounded that bend and saw their promised land before them they gave vent to much humour: Broadchalk

laughed too; the cackle of conversation gave them rhythm for those last few miles.

## XVI

They turned into a broad avenue lined by mighty trees. Here had been the houses of the rich men of Béthune: now white-walled ghosts, their windows broken and boarded, their roofs shot away, silent, grim and darkened, gazed quietly at the intruders: flinched, as if they feared to flaunt the hope of shelter that they could not fulfil. Béthune! The very word sent a thrill through Broadchalk's soul. It had always spelled ghosts to him, since the first time that he had imagined the terrible figure in a red cloak leave his house at Athos's summons: since he had first pictured the sweep of the sword in the moonlight, seen that kneeling flaunting woman with the white bare neck: heard the gasp of horror from the group of frightened men huddling beyond the ferry.

Béthune was a city of cellars, of broken shell-tossed houses with eyeless sockets. Here and there men lurked, soldiers mostly, for some reserves were billeted in the ruins.

They marched through silently, like a party of ghouls searching a charnel house. The cobbled stones gave back the hollow echoes of their footfalls: it was as if they were searching, searching for the executioner, groping in a dead city to fulfil an errand that death had long made useless.

In the market-place a few men had congregated to watch their entry: the battalion stiffened and marched past with the swing of barrack-square.

Broadchalk's eyes searched right and left—where

did he live now, that terrible figure? The glimpse of a few loiterers in a doorway quickened his pulse. Were they the three, waiting in the close while Athos stumbled up the stairs in search of his quarry?

Béthune!

They marched a mile beyond the town and came to the hamlet of Beuvry, lying at the meeting of the forked roads which lead to La Bassée and Vermelles. Only two kilometres now—each of these roads led to the waiting men, distant less than a half-hour's sharp walk.

The company bivouacked in a railway siding, on the banks of a narrow canal. At the gate of the siding stood a small *estaminet*.

'It's only for a few hours,' said Morell; 'five to be exact. It's half-past one already.'

A subaltern of the battalion in billets came to the door as he spoke.

'You fellows are just in time for the show,' he said.

'How long have you been here?'

'Three months.'

'What's it like?'

'Pretty decent, so far. But we're going to get them on the run now.'

He took a candle from an old woman with a greasy lace cap drawn over her dishevelled hair. 'I've got a bed,' he said proudly. 'Cheerioh!'

They stumbled up the narrow wooden stair in his wake, and found themselves in a large attic. There was one bed in the room, upon which Morell stretched himself: Ennis, Aubrey, Trevor and Broadchalk pulled off their boots, and lay on the floor, their heads propped on their packs. It was a wooden floor, devoid of mattress, or even carpet, but they were not cavilling; even their

thigh bones seemed to find some yielding spot in those ancient timbers. Within two minutes they were asleep: within two minutes they seemed to be awake again, with the echo of a crash in their ears. A second ear-splitting roar followed. A naval gun, mounted on a truck in the railway siding, had opened fire on the enemy heavy artillery.

It was half-past six o'clock on Saturday morning, September 25th, 1915. The battle of Loos had begun.

# BROADCHALK

## PART II

*Fosse No. 8 de Béthune*

FOSSE NO. 8 DE BÉTHUNE

*September 25 to 28, 1915*

## I

Trevor and Broadchalk pulled on their boots and scuttled down the stairs of the *estaminet*. In the daylight the hamlet showed signs of life: the ghosts had departed at dawn and the villagers were already moving about their business.

The naval gun boomed at regular intervals like Big Ben striking a long hour, the hour of expectation, when the line should at last be rolled back and the enemy be revealed 'on the run.'

Early rumours of success began to trickle through: the German first and second lines had fallen in the first assault.

Morell had gone to Headquarters: Trevor and Broadchalk, joined by Ennis and Aubrey, strolled through the village, ferreted out the gun which had been the disturber of their slumber and watched it, as one would watch the operation of some gigantic machine at an engineering exhibition.

There was a strange quiet: the roar of the artillery had slackened, seemed almost silent: the pop-pop of the anti-aircraft guns disturbed the peace no more than some assiduous woodpecker will disturb a forest's calm. There was nothing to show of the pageant that was being unfolded at the ends of those two short straight roads. Breakfast found the village still untouched, still peaceful; Morell had returned without instructions and without news: they were to stand by.

'Why don't we start now?' asked Broadchalk innocently, slicing the top off his second egg.

'Don't ask questions: stuff yourself with food,' answered Morell. 'You never know when you're going to get your next meal.' Aubrey, who had collected far more rumours than had ever reached the village, was able to give an account of the first attack.

It was at this moment that the enemy paid them their first compliment. There was a sudden crash from the neighbourhood of the railway siding. 'Sit down, Broadchalk,' called out Aubrey, but Broadchalk and Ennis had already left the *estaminet*.

They found the men in a state of uproarious amusement, coupled with some indignation at the enemy's impertinence. To send a heavy shell into a peaceful body of supports three miles behind the line simply wasn't done when you were 'on the run.'

That shell aroused more interest than the gunners who loaded it into the howitzer had imagined possible. According to unimpeachable testimony it had passed between the heads of Sergeant Brown and Lance-Corporal Jukes while they were engaged in the popular recreation of watching the aeroplanes. Fifty men had felt the wind of it: yet it had not only had the indecency to miss them all: it had landed in a slumbering canal behind the railway without exploding.

Broadchalk administered a dose of Campbelline before returning to his egg: 'You can see what their shooting's worth,' he said sententiously.

He reported the incident to Morell on his return. 'One of their heavies looking for that naval gun,' mumbled the old warrior. Broadchalk was overcome by such a display of military intuition, and rapped with his spoon on a third eggshell to hide his confusion: it

proved to be a reversed empty, placed on his plate by Ennis.

'When is something going to happen?' he asked Trevor eagerly. Breakfast was over and they were exploring the village together. Trevor grunted. He was as excited as Broadchalk, but he took care not to show it, whereas Broadchalk did not care who saw his enthusiasm.

'I say, after this they won't consider us kids any longer, will they? I mean—we shall be much more than twenty, shan't we?'

Trevor contracted his eyes and blew a cloud of smoke down his nostrils before bursting into his inexplicable chuckle—but he did not hand on the joke to Ennis when he joined them.

Excitement number one—a spy! They hurried to the crossroads. A small miserable little man with a grey pasty face, two haggard black eyes and a long square black beard—could it be Broadchalk's friend from Embry, foiled in his machinations at the very front line, in the teeth of the enemy, so to speak? He was dressed in a short black coat and grey trousers, with a little cloth cap on his head, and was escorted by a Scottish lance-corporal and private. 'He looks like a Colney Hatch lunatic,' said Broadchalk. 'Do you think they will string him up in Béthune?'

Excitement number two! He came down the road from Vermelles, walking like a pilgrim, with a great staff in his hand on which he leaned. He was plastered with light-brown clay, through which the khaki gleamed in dark sodden patches, like a map. His kilt swung gaily to the lilt of his march. His coat was gone: the left sleeve and a great slice of his shirt had been cut away, and a bandage swathed his broad shoulders like a

bandolier. There was blood on his arms, blood on his hands, blood on his face, blood on his mighty knees: dried blood, brick-red. As he stopped he waved, greeting his friends with a roar: a man steeped in victory and triumph, a man fresh from a mighty moment, from a field mightier than any that Broadchalk had hoped to tread. He was the first to return of those miraculous Scotsmen who had slipped the leash that morning: and as he came back he imparted nothing but supreme confidence, supreme encouragement, supreme hope!

If Broadchalk—who as a civilian had stepped aside from a cut finger—had any doubts of how he might behave when the time came, those doubts were swept aside at the advent of that prophet. War was clean, was good, if it could rouse such spirit in man, could inspire him as it had inspired the Highland giant. Broadchalk had been ready to die, to be hurt; now he felt a calm serenity that steadied him, and sent him forward happily. His outlook was broadened while the giant's pæan still boomed in his ears. Somewhere there was a field where men khaki and men grey were grappled in conflict. He could picture them now: khaki men running forward with their bayonets, grey men with little spiked hats popping out of holes like crickets to the teasing of a straw—popping back again. This man had come from it. How many crickets had he teased before one had teased him? He, Broadchalk, was going to it; how many crickets would he tease when the time came?

The giant passed by, but another took his place; then two, then four, then a group; that peaceful road to Vermelles suddenly teemed with men, cheery men, laughing men, men green in the face with a joke on their lips; and everywhere those splashes of brick-red, the common badge of fellowship. There was no rank among

those walking cases—and no distinction of race. Grey mingled with the khaki: three men reeled together, an Englishman and a Scotsman, supporting by the waist a wounded German *feldwebel*, who staggered between them, his arms clasped about their necks.

Ambulances dashed backwards and forwards: a horse battery pushed up in the direction of Vermelles: staff cars: ammunition limbers going up full, ammunition limbers coming down empty. The narrow road was already jammed.

If now, instead of parading in that ring of villages behind the front, the Eleventh Corps, blessed before the assault by the sight of that wounded giant, had been launched against the third line of the enemy, to what depth might the spearhead of Loos have not penetrated?

## II

The battalion paraded in line at the side of the road, B Company on the right, nearest to Vermelles. The post corporal hurried up with the mail: there was one letter for Broadchalk, addressed in a hand that he did not recognise, a hand that had made a muddle of his name and rank. He opened and read it; looked at it mystified and read it again: then he glanced along the ranks of his platoon until his eyes fell upon a tall healthy red-haired boy—Private Jones. Jones was one of his best men, one of his machine-gunners too, though that reserve machine-gun section seemed a thing of the past. Twice he had been recommended for a stripe, and twice he had been turned down on the score of his youth —and Morell had been right—the boy was only sixteen!

Broadchalk stared at the letter in amazement. It was

from Jones's mother, a pathetic letter written in a moment of agony when she had realised, by some vague intuition, that her son was about to go into battle. How she had learnt his name Broadchalk did not know—but she addressed him as if he were of her generation, as if he could share her fears, and extend to her his sympathy. Her boy was sixteen! He had told them he was nineteen when he was only sixteen! He ought to be at school! Would Broadchalk save him—have him sent back? He would understand, he would feel for her! Her only son, and only sixteen! He would understand!

Broadchalk, who had enlisted when he was nineteen and told them he was twenty because they swore he was under age, was not so sure that he did understand; another glimpse of that young bull-calf Jones baiting Corporal Hammett, made him quite sure that the boy, at any rate, would not understand. He stuffed the letter into his pocket—for he could do nothing.

A section commander, with a brawny private in tow —a navvy in private life—stepped forward and saluted. 'Private Johnson wishes to speak to you, sir.' Private Johnson, whose letters Broadchalk felt least comfortable when censoring, for he poured out his simple soul unabashedly to his wife and eight children, held out a hand in which lay fourteen shillings and tenpence. 'It's my money, sir. Will you look after it for me—and send it home if I'm hit?' He thrust the money into Broadchalk's hand.

Broadchalk gazed at it in embarrassment. 'But—but I may be hit instead of you,' he said. 'You had better send it home now.'

'Company!' It was Morell's voice calling B Company to attention.

Johnson slipped back into the ranks; Broadchalk, still clenching the money, moved quickly to his place in front of his platoon and waited for the word.

'Fall out the officers.'

The village was so packed, for two streams of wounded were converging at the crossroads, that Morell seemed to be riding his horse at the edge of the sea. The men had fallen in as close to the side of the road as possible. Limbers clattered past; there was a continuous babel of sound.

'There's a job waiting for you blokes,' sang out a wounded man.

Broadchalk edged through the crowd and joined the other subalterns at Morell's side.

'Each company is to leave out two officers. Ennis, you'll have to stand down, for you're second in command. Broadchalk, you're the junior officer, you must join Ennis.'

'What's that?' gasped Broadchalk.

'You've got to stay behind,' repeated Trevor.

Broadchalk was speechless: he could not believe his ears. He thought at first that Morell was pulling his leg, but there was a serious look in that jovial face that precluded any idea of a jest.

'Bad luck,' said Aubrey: he spoke kindly, but the words had the sting of a whip-lash.

A great lump came into Broadchalk's throat: his lips started to tremble and he knew that his eyes were filling with tears. He heard Morell's words as through a mist. 'You've got to report to Brigade Headquarters.' He felt the touch of his hand as it was laid on his shoulder. Ennis was staring to his front, his eyes wide open, a sure sign of anger.

Broadchalk dared not speak: he backed towards his

platoon and stood there quivering, fearing to let the men catch a glimpse of his face. The tears had welled up with a vengeance. 'I mustn't blub,' he said to himself. He swallowed and blew his nose.

The moment came when he must face his men. He heard the click of his sergeant's heels behind him, and the slap of his hand on the stock of his rifle.

He spun round, and noted the surprise on his sergeant's face.

'I'm not coming with you,' he said, with a choke. A vision came to him of that gate, and the eager faces upturned to him from the ground. He had spoken loud enough for the platoon to hear, and he heard a murmur pass down the ranks: 'Broadchalk's not coming!'

'Not what, sir?'

'Not coming. Mr. Ennis and I have got to stay behind.'

The sergeant could find no words, and made no attempt to answer.

Ennis moved to his side and put a hand on his arm. 'Cheer up, Babe,' he said.

'We've not to go off now, have we?' Anger came to him as a relief. 'Where in the hell is the Brigade? What are you going to do about it?'

'Fall in with the rest of them, and wait until I'm pitched out.' Ennis pressed Broadchalk's arm and walked back to the rear of the company.

'B Company. Move to the right in fours, form fours! Right! By the left, Quick—March!'

They mingled with the crowd, pushed their way through the congestion at the crossroads and found themselves swinging along the right-hand road towards Vermelles.

Broadchalk's platoon was leading and Morell, still

on his charger, turned into the column in front of him.

'You oughtn't to be here, you young devil,' he said. 'What are you doing?'

'I thought I would hang on until we reached Brigade H.Q.'

Morell chuckled. 'Right ho! You would have been lost anyway if you had stayed behind at Beuvry. I wish those water-carts would turn up. Have you examined the men's water-bottles?'

'Yes, sir. They're all empty.'

An order had gone out that morning that no water-bottles were to be filled at the billets or at any source of public water supply. There were rumours of contaminated water: only the diluted carbolic served out by the M.O. was to be carried into action. Being raw they had respected that order: old hands who, to be on the safe side, had filled their bottles in case the carts shouldn't turn up, were made to empty them out into the road. The carts did not turn up, and thus it happened that the battalion went into action without a drop of water.

Progress up the road was slow, for it was blocked by four streams of traffic: the wounded on the left, coming down in a continuous stream: ambulances, limbers and cars in two lines in the centre, going different ways; the battalion on the right, often half in the ditch, marching up to the line.

Neither shot nor shell harassed them: it seemed as if the enemy had been pushed off the map: 'They're running! They're running!' It seemed true enough, of their guns at any rate, for they made no attempt to shell the roads which they must have guessed were packed with reserves. They were too much engrossed in saving their pieces, or holding up the line of attacking infantry. And so the attacking line got thinner and

thinner while their supports were sandwiched in a traffic jam two miles away, with the sun at its zenith.

A car came down containing two German officers, spick and span, as the German officer always seemed to be—they must have been surprised in some billet behind the second line. They bowed and saluted Morell.

A batch of prisoners was being marched down the path among the wounded: twenty dazed and haggard men, plucked miraculously from the furnace: of odd shapes and sizes: some bearded, all uncouth: their clothes ill fitting; their small forage caps, perched on the top of their heads, giving them a curious civilian aspect, as if they had spent a heavy Saturday afternoon on an allotment.

Broadchalk looked at them with mingled feelings of curiosity and surprise. He had not thought of prisoners: now they suddenly appeared to him as one of the inseparable commodities of war.

These men seemed harmless enough: the corporal in charge seemed almost proud of them: the wounded were friendly with them too. Number Eight grinned at them as men smile at the sight of an unknown beast in the Zoo. 'Reg'lar music-hall 'Uns, ain't they, sir,' remarked Bakewell.

But a strong injection of Campbelline was at hand. A corps staff car passed at that moment, and in it was one who should have known better. He rose to his feet, and pointed to that group of dejected men, shaking his fist. Then he turned to Number Eight platoon. 'There are the bastards, boys: there are the bastards. Don't leave a bloody mother's son of them alive.'

The car bore him onwards, still gesticulating. He shouted more encouragements, but his words were lost in the uproar that he had stirred up. It was super-

Campbelline at its purest, no doubt, but it was the devil of a nuisance. It took Broadchalk five minutes to get his platoon in hand again.

They had now reached the area of trenches and wire, at first beautiful models of military construction, sandbagged with the precision of a cathedral mason, wired with the accuracy of a park gardener: clean-cut traverses like the squares on a chessboard: reserve lines that had never been occupied. Then they came to sterner stuff, in places shot away and shapeless: large shell-holes in the road, filled with rubble from the débris of houses: strange names on signposts pointing the way for ration parties at night—Piccadilly, Dover Street, Old Kent Road, Marble Arch. Still no sign of an enemy, no hint of resistance.

The wounded were tailing off now: the walking cases from that first assault had been evacuated: only stretcher cases were left in the forward clearing stations. They passed a great cage full of prisoners, and saw others squatting down in a field: rumour had it that there were fifteen hundred behind Vermelles alone. 'Chucked their 'ands up as soon as we got over the top,' said a wounded Tommy. 'Got this from a machine-gun.' He pointed to a bandaged head on which his gas mask sat like a turban, for they all wore these turbans: the cap seemed to have disappeared as an article of dress in the British kit. They looked strangely like maimed beetles, for the valve of the gas mask stuck up in front above the glass goggles like a single antenna.

'Halt. Fall out.' The battalion sat down in a ditch for three-quarters of an hour while a cavalry brigade filed across their path at right angles; and, having cleared them, was recalled and filed back again. Thus it happened that the Brigade was separated from the rest

of the division, and diverted from its true position in the scheme of operations.

An excited staff officer, standing at the crossroads of Vermelles, ran towards them and held out his hands, just as they had got clear of the cavalry obstruction. There was a long colloquy, as a result of which the battalion turned left from the Hulluch road and moved through Vermelles. The company had already cleared the crossroads and turned about. Broadchalk found himself marching with Ennis again at the rear of the column. To fall out and join Brigade Headquarters was now out of the question; for all they knew they would be in action in five minutes.

It had started to rain, a dreary soaking drizzle that developed into a steady downpour: the first rain for a month. They were off the road now and trudging through fields, curious unkempt fields that had been on the verge of no-man's-land: fields that the guns had forbidden to revert to pasture.

Once clear of the village they saw a long stretch of flat dreary waste, scarred with trenches and carefully wired. They were now in the British second line. 'Blob!' called out Morell, who was still on his horse.

They broke up into sections, in artillery formation, and huddled down in the open in groups, fifty yards between each group, covered by their ground-sheets, while the rain lashed upon them. They sat there until late in the afternoon: when the order came to advance. They moved slowly forward for a mile, then closed, and pushed on again in open order; they seemed farther from the war than ever.

Beyond a clump of stumps that had been trees they saw the old British support line, and moved on towards it. A field battery had unlimbered at the edge of the

trenches, and was firing at long-distance ranges. In the far distance they could see a village burning on the horizon,[1] and the spout of mud and smoke as the shells found their mark. They could follow the shells by their swizz as they cut through the air. For another half-hour they sat: then Morell gave the signal to close and Broadchalk, having closed his platoon, doubled across the face of that battery. The guns were a good two hundred yards in the rear, but the crack of a salvo nearly burst Broadchalk's ear-drums: he clutched at his head, not sure that it had not been blown from his shoulders.

Odd bullets, strays, were now winging through the air: he could hear their ping as they whistled over his head. His men were extended behind the parapet of the old support line, standing up, ready to push on. The Adjutant had appeared, and was moving towards Morell. One of these strays must have passed him nearer than he cared, for he looked about him for an object on which to vent his wrath.

'Mr. Broadchalk, you bloody young fool. Get your men under cover from this heavy fire!' Broadchalk had never liked him.

## III

They went to earth in the old trenches, posted sentries, and waited in the drizzle until daylight turned to dusk, and dusk to darkness. With nightfall came the moon; the mist cleared and the rain lifted.

Broadchalk sat in a dug-out with Ennis, where Morell joined them. He was scandalised at their coolness, and lectured Broadchalk.

[1] Cité St. Pierre.

'You ought to be inspecting your sentries,' he said. 'It's their first time in and anything may happen.'

Broadchalk stared at him in astonishment: the war was as remote as ever: who in their senses could suggest that there was an enemy for two miles. He scrambled out on his hands and knees into the trench, rose to his feet and walked from man to man: they were all keen and most of them excited; the men off duty were lying under the lea of the overhanging parapet. It was obvious that they too thought that any minute a line of *pickel-haubes* might bear down upon them, and were more than ready to tackle the situation. He returned to the dug-out and assured Morell that everything was quiet and that the men were up to scratch: he received a chuckle of laughter for his pains.

For a long time they sat there. The dug-out was a hole scraped out of the back of the trench and revetted: one crawled into it and just had room to sit up, so that it was a tight squeeze for the three of them. Morell was pointing out their position on a map with the help of a lighted match when they heard the Adjutant's voice, speaking down into the trench.

'Is Morell there?' There was a grunt as Morell squeezed through the small opening.

'Morell. The Sussex are in a nasty hole at Fosse 8, and we've got to get them out of it.'

The rest of his instructions could not be heard, for Morell had joined him on the top of the trench.

The Sussex! Then the rest of the Brigade had been in action all the time they were sitting in those lousy trenches. But how could they be in a hole, if the Germans were on the run?

Broadchalk collected his men on the top of the

trench. His instructions were simple. He was to follow the platoons in front of him, in artillery formation, and not lose touch.

Morell blew his whistle. They set out in the track of those Scotsmen who had dashed forward exactly ten hours earlier, though there was no quarry waiting for them. Their movements were almost sedate as they slipped forward into the darkness. The rain had beaten the soil into a sticky mess of brown clay, through which they slithered and slid. Strands of wire tripped them up, wooden stakes, hidden in the mud, rose up and smote them whenever an unwary foot trod on the pointed ends, as if the planters were having one last act of revenge, a sort of practical joke, upon their pursuers. Beyond the wire yawned a line of gaps in the earth—the old enemy front line—pounded into shapelessness, converted into a mixture of mound and ditch, crossed by the plank bridges that had been carried by the assaulting infantry. Here and there, intermingled with the earth, lay grey crumpled shapes that had been men; a boot sticking out from a mud heap, a huddled form at the bottom of a ditch, a helmet caught fast in a mesh of wire, a rifle half buried in a shell-hole.

They cleared the line, found firm footing in the long grass beyond, and pushed forward half right, keeping in the wake of the blobs in front, only turning aside to avoid stumbling into the narrow communication trenches which, snake-like, threaded the ground in every direction. Over the crest of the slope they came to more wire, orderly wire laid out in squares, a foot high from the ground, pinned to the earth by small pegs, set out like upturned harrows. Here there were other shapes, and many of them; men in kilts who had fallen forward as they ran, and lay still, their rifles thrust in

front of them, their packs hunched, their heads buried in their arms.

The wire could be penetrated only at given points, where the artillery had ploughed a way through, or the sappers had cut gaps after the advance. Near these gaps the dead lay thicker, for the attackers had bunched and the machine-guns had found good targets.

Progress was slower. It became more and more difficult for the blobs to keep their formation; there was a risk of losing touch with the platoon in front. Broadchalk saw Trevor close his platoon and followed suit. All was quiet, save for the shaking of the entrenching tools against the empty water-bottles and the murmurs of the men as they pointed out the wonders of the battlefield one to another; there was little to show that ahead of them two lines of infantry were at death grip. Shells whistled overhead from the British batteries, but the enemy made no reply. How could the Sussex be in a hole? This was more like a field day at Aldershot, saving the presence of those huddled dead.

Broadchalk had closed his sections to ten paces, and they made better going. A second line of trenches was crossed, wide yawning chasms, which needed a run, a jump and a scramble to clear. Private Millett, a small bent figure who stumbled along like a pedlar, one of that ill-fated draft, fell into each trench with absolute regularity, and was hauled out again with the same regularity by Corporal Hammett.

''E ain't a bad little beggar, and 'e's got a good 'eart. Pick yer feet up, Birdseed.'

'I'm picking 'em up, corporal,' sighed the little man, and disappeared with a flop into the next communication trench. They lugged him out again with roars of laughter.

## IV

It came very suddenly, with a spit and a crash, and a shower of mud. As one man they extended and rushed forward to a fold in the ground. It was no job of theirs to get into a trench, so they took what cover they could.

Broadchalk found Ennis at his side. 'This is something like it,' he shouted. Ennis grinned, then both squashed their faces into the mud as a shell burst a few feet in front of them.

For twenty minutes the Germans searched the ground with shrapnel: put up a great curtain—for these were the days before the barrage had become a weapon of precision—which should shut off the firing-line from its supports. The ground sloped gently upwards: it was the last stretch of no-man's-land between the German first line and the great prepared position which ran through the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

Broadchalk watched the shells falling, saw them advance and recede, counted them as they came nearer, nearer, until it seemed that the next must land right on top of him. At the first shriek of a shell that seemed uncomfortably near he would lie close, hugging the ground with his chin and knees, waiting for the slap that would tell him that he had stopped something; but no slap came, only an odd sting or two on the face and arms, as if he had been struck by a spark from a passing railway engine.

'Pretty rotten stuff they're putting over,' he said to Ennis.

'Just as well,' the older man grunted.

The shelling stopped as suddenly as it had started. Broadchalk blew his whistle, and they moved on. He went from section to section: no casualties were re-

ported, and the men were in a state of great merriment, calling out to one another as they gave an excited account of their hair-breadth escapes—for it seemed to each that he bore a charmed life.

Broadchalk administered a dose of Campbelline. 'If that's the best they can do in a bombardment it doesn't say much for their shooting.' The words were barely out of his mouth when it started again. This time there was no fold in the ground. They fell flat where they stood, Broadchalk against something which shone white in the moonlight, and proved to be the lower half of a Highlander, who had been cut in two by a shell: they found his other half a few feet away, a sergeant with three new *chevrons*.

Again no casualties. 'It must be damned difficult to hit a man with a field-gun,' said Ennis: 'especially when you don't know he's there!'

The battalion was closing fast on their first objective, and they quickened their pace. At the start the four companies had been strung over a front of a mile: they had been converging on four compass bearings, all leading to a slag heap a hundred yards wide. All formation had vanished: companies, platoons and sections were hopelessly mixed up; the battalion was little more than a mob of joking men, who leaped trenches, helped one another over chasms, and pressed forward three and four deep, cheered and cursed by their officers as occasion demanded.

Before them loomed a dark mass, the Dump at *Fosse Numéro Huit de Béthune*, or Fosse 8. Beneath the shadow of that Dump they halted, and groped vainly for their platoon and section commanders. There was the best part of two regiments crowded into a space that would have paraded a battalion in close column.

Company commanders shouted, subalterns shouted, sergeants shouted, corporals shouted; in an attempt to straighten the tangle.

Broadchalk, who had a voice befitting a man twice his size, had succeeded in extricating his platoon from the mob. Above him he could see a party of the Sussex sent haphazard to line the edge of the Dump and loose off their rifles in order to cover the din. For the first time he realised that they must be close on top of the enemy, and the fact mystified him: it had no bearing on the progress of the offensive.

A tall figure came striding angrily from the direction of the Dump—a man who had long since exhausted every forcible word in his vocabulary, who alone realised that a single hint of that concentration would bring every enemy gun in the sector to bear on that patch behind the slag heap and wipe out his brigade.

Broadchalk had drawn his men free from the tangle, and his platoon stood in the Brigadier's path.

'Here, you, whoever you are.'

'B Company. Fusiliers, sir.'

'Follow me in single file.'

There was no need to enjoin silence. The Brigadier's arrival had put the seal on the work of disentanglement: the men slipped quietly into their places.

## V

Broadchalk trod delicately in the wake of the Brigadier. Leaving the Dump on their right they moved quietly in the direction of the enemy, through a field strewn with the débris of a disused coal mine. The moon lit up the black lines of an old light railway: they came

to a levelled brick wall over which they clambered; then another wall with gaps in it, through which they crawled. The Dump was the shape of two sausages bent like an L, and it receded from them on their right. On their left they could see the ends of some rows of houses, with glassless windows and holed roofs, the doors long since vanished, but solid brick nevertheless, showing no signs of heavy bombardment. Here and there a shrub or hedge stood up from the litter that had once been a row of miners' gardens—but of man there was no trace: no sign that a firing-line stood before them, that a watchful enemy was waiting beyond.

It was ten o'clock.

Still the Brigadier moved on, while Broadchalk followed, playing page to his Wenceslaus.

The full moon lit up the ground so that it gleamed white; the men clanked quietly behind: the shadows of the houses or shrubs were black and clean cut.

During the whole of that advance it had seemed to Broadchalk that they had been passing through the confines of the Dead. Death had hung over that two miles of storm-swept country, not in the presence of the huddled heaps of grey and khaki, nor in the whistling bullets and shrieking shrapnel that the enemy were hurling at him, but as a sensation of something to be achieved mysteriously, something to be waited for: they were souls held in suspense between two spheres of action.

In that deserted area beyond the mine, and about those rows of cottages, this feeling was still deeper. The broken walls, the long grass, the deserted railway, hinted at a sudden suspension of activity due to the fulfilment of their purpose—a fulfilment not discernible by the senses of touch, smell, sight or hearing.

'There is something between my forehead and my belly which I know to be me,' Broadchalk had once said: it was this something that in the past had controlled his imagination. Now he had suddenly become detached from it; life was uncoloured, unwoven. And while he pondered over these things subconsciously his conscious fancy could see no further than the crossed swords on the Brigadier's shoulder straps, just as Corporal Hammett's eyes might be fixed on the two ribbons—blue and red parti-coloured—that protruded from the back of Broadchalk's collar. And suddenly Broadchalk found himself in touch with Life once more, Life tenacious, Life vigilant, Life spurning the mysteries of Death, Life edging ever backward from the threshold of Achievement.

The Brigadier had passed the third and last row of houses. He turned left, pushed aside a clump of bushes, and disappeared down a narrow slope into the earth. Here were men, in a narrow, shallow trench: serious, wan men, who leant against the trench and peered over the parapet; men that neither moved a muscle nor uttered a whisper, but waited silently, their hands fingering their rifles: men who had left their trenches at six-thirty that morning, had snatched those two miles of coveted territory from the enemy, had reached the line of those houses, and were now holding on to their gains.

'Who are you?'

'Black Watch!'

'Is this the front line?'

Surprise so overwhelming that no reply was possible. .

'How far away are the Germans?'

'About a hundred yards. Keep your head down. They've got a machine-gun trained on this corner.'

'Keep your head down!' Broadchalk followed the Brigadier. How deadly earnest those Scotsmen were! Every man of them seemed to know more than he did: had learnt to look after himself, and in looking after himself to preserve his yard of the line.

There was a subaltern at the corner.

'What sort of a time did you have?'

'Not bad. They chucked their hands up when we went over. Their machine-guns got us by the redoubt —wiped most of us out. Mind you hold on to this trench.'

'Hold on to it? We're pushing on to-morrow morning!'

The subaltern seemed surprised. 'I don't think you will. We're pretty far forward here as it is: they'll probably counter-attack at dawn.'

Broadchalk followed the Brigadier. He was puzzled. How about that line between Lille and Douai? Of course they were going to carry on the attack at dawn —that fellow couldn't know. Rotten about those machine-guns, though—according to Campbell our guns should have flattened them. . . . What were our gunners doing now, anyhow? . . . there wasn't a shell landing in the enemy, as far as he could see . . . at any rate it wasn't midnight yet . . . plenty of time before dawn . . . so this was the front line!

He peered over the parapet to see if there was any visible sign of the enemy. It was as quiet as any other autumn field after nightfall.

The trench swung back at right angles away from the enemy. It passed between two rows of houses, cutting the village in half; they filed down it silently.

After a hundred yards the trench ended; the line was prolonged along a curved brick wall which

wound to the right. It had been loopholed every three or four yards, and at each loophole stood a Highlander watching. Through a gap Broadchalk could see the trees of an orchard, the lines of the hedges and the shapes of the houses beyond.

The Brigadier told him to halt and close, so he stood there quietly with his men, waiting for the rest of the company to come up.

If now they had cleared up that orchard, pushed beyond the hedges, cleaned out the houses, and carried the line right round the houses! There would have been little if any opposition; a strong point with a machine-gun could have been established in the corner house to serve as a pivot for the line: they could have enfiladed any counter-attack against the left flank, which was in the air; even made it possible for that flank, upon which the holding of Fosse 8 depended, to be consolidated.

As it was, Campbelline had gripped them to the extent of eliminating their common sense: their minds dwelt solely on those words which had been spoken to encourage and had been received as an axiom that was to outweigh every other consideration. The orchard and houses were welcomed as good cover behind which a further attack might concentrate: the idea, or necessity, of defence never entered their minds: the vision of the Douai line haunted them, as a nightmare load sits on an over-filled belly. Fosse 8 was lost because it was never seriously defended. It was occupied by an expectant infantry waiting impatiently for the order to advance: waiting for the crashing gun-fire that was to exterminate this impudent opposition: remembering ever that implicit order: 'Push on as far as you can by individual platoons. Don't worry about your flanks.'

If that Saturday night, and all the day and night that was to follow, had been spent in consolidating the position, the village and the Dump would not have changed hands and the story of the northern sector of the Loos battle would have read differently. Instead, a surprised and bewildered body of men, who had spent forty enjoyable hours in spite of hunger, thirst, and a complete lack of sleep, suddenly found themselves nearly surrounded.

The Germans had been presented with a situation which gave them full scope for their favourite tactics. They set about with a will to isolate the British, until they were represented by a succession of small groups of men who, cut off from supplies, must, however great their determination, be rolled up from flank and rear in turn. So it was at Fosse 8. The Fusiliers were given enough by the Germans to keep them busy and amused, while the exposed flanks and gaps in the line on their left and right were being slowly but surely whittled away.

Morell arrived on the scene and took over the command; the Brigadier had vanished and the Scotsmen were relieved. Trevor guarded the wall and pushed out men to get into touch with the Northants on his left, who had thrown back a refused flank in an attempt to join up with the northern limit of the advance, represented by the shattered left brigade of the Ninth Division.[1] During the whole of the operations Trevor's left flank was in the air. He was only once in close touch with the Northants: indeed, for the greater part of the battle, he was separated only by a traverse from the Germans. He had no field of fire and his front was blocked by a brick wall, an orchard, some lines of

[1] They were confronting the Madagascar and Mad Point positions.

hedges and a row of houses. If the brigade had had any experience of trench warfare they would have cleared up that left flank before dawn: as it was they accepted it as a legacy, a precarious position which they expected to leave behind them at daybreak. Number Seven carried on the line from Trevor's right up to fifty yards from the corner of Corons Trench, where they handed over to Broadchalk. He held the T of the position, forty yards of trench at right angles to the enemy and forty yards parallel. On his right were two platoons of A Company, and beyond them Aubrey. These six platoons covered the miners' cottages, called Corons de Pékin. Their nearest supports were the gallant remnants of the 9th Division who, after they had been relieved, had retired to the line of trenches in front of the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

The Sussex covered the Dump as far as the junction of Fosse Alley and Slag Alley, while the Middlesex on the right formed a similar function to the Northants on the left, and attempted, by echeloning their flank, to get into touch with the left of the 7th Division north-east of the Quarries. The Brigade was thus hanging in strips, like a curtain, across the line that had been reached by the centre and right brigade of the 9th Division: they afforded those calm, hard-headed Scotsmen time to lick their wounds and take a breather: and they would have paid them much in gold for a quarter of their experience. As it was, they stood in a line of shallow trenches, waiting for the daylight to give them their first glimpse of the enemy; to show them what a battlefield looks like, and reveal what the moon had hidden.

## VI

That Saturday night was cold. During the advance they had had no sense of physical conditions: now while they were waiting they realised that they were wet through: that the moon had brought a hard frost: that they had had no food for eighteen hours, and that their throats were dry and filmy with the mud and fumes of a battlefield.

There was no need to post sentries: each man stood staring, waiting for the first streak of grey dusk that should herald dawn.

Broadchalk had taken up his position at the apex of the right angle which he was holding. The gardens of the cottages had been used by the German burial parties, and a strong smell of corpse clung to the trench. Above his head, surrounded by a few plants and a pot with flowers, was a large white wooden cross with black letters painted upon it, indicating that Hugo Schwabe—*Ober-leutnant*—had found the *Heldentod* in February 1915. Who Hugo Schwabe could have been to merit such attention as flowers seven months after his death Broadchalk did not know, but it was obvious that he could not be far distant, that a very few inches of clay scraped out from the front of the trench would bring them face to face.

The hours dragged by slowly, punctured by false alarms. Broadchalk sent out a couple of patrols, but all was reported to be quiet. Ennis passed through the platoon on his way to the Second in Command, who had joined Aubrey's platoon on the right of the line.

'When are we going to kick off?' asked Broadchalk.

'At ten o'clock, so I'm told—but we have had no orders yet. Well, Babe, how do you like it?'

'Not bad at all. I could do with a little less of Hugo.'

Ennis smiled. 'Keep your eyes skinned: they may try to rush us: we haven't got any wire, remember.'

'Let me know if anything turns up.'

Sunday morning rose with a burst of rifle fire on the right; two German Guard divisions had made an attempt to rush the Dump and the Quarries. Only Aubrey got a fleeting target at the flankers, and the sun rose with the calm and peace of an early autumn morning in England.

It was obviously Sunday: the mist that hung over the fields: the hoar frost glittering in the low sunlight: the silent red houses and deserted streets of the village of Auchy lez la Bassée less than a quarter of a mile in front of them: all spelt the magic of a rural Sunday morning.

It seemed that the peasants were still abed: that, one by one, slender trails of smoke would rise from the chimneys. Crack! A grey form had slipped along a wall in the village and simultaneously two rifles had spoken from Number Eight.

'Any luck?'

'Couldn't see, sir.'

Ennis came down. 'No orders yet, but it doesn't look as if we shall do anything this morning.'

'What about some water: can't we get hold of any?'

'Trevor's sent back a couple of men, but they couldn't find anybody.'

The morning passed fitfully. The sun was shining and it was hot in the trench, so that the men became thirstier than ever.

The enemy kept up a desultory shell-fire, but did little except knock the trench about: there were no casualties. The gunners were over-sighting and con-

centrating on the houses: their snipers also peppered the slates of the roofs with bullets, drilling holes here and there, as if they had not realised that the British were holding the narrow communication trench in front.

Towards midday, as the shelling became heavier, they scraped little funk-holes in the front of the trench into which they could thrust their heads and take some shelter from the shrapnel. It was now thirty hours since the men had had food or water, and a written order was passed down the line, instructing all ranks to eat their iron rations—a dozen little round biscuits of the dog variety, and a tin of bully beef.

'Iron, did yer say?'

'Yus. Iron.'

'Gawd! There goes my back molar!'

Private Millett thrust a vulture-like beak forth from the concave recess into which he had fitted his body. 'Eatin' this 'ere,' he squeaked. 'Does that mean that we're surrounded?'

'Don't think so much. Ye're supposed to be a bloody sojer.'

'Mr. Broadchalk wanted on the left!' The message was shouted down the line. Broadchalk was wrestling with his bully-beef tin and a tin-opener; he placed it reverently in his niche together with the mess tin containing the biscuits, and set out down the trench.

When he got to the end of the line it proved to be a false alarm: nobody had sent for him, nobody could be found who had started the message. He spent a couple of minutes with Trevor, and returned angrily down the trench trying to find out if anyone had been playing the fool. As he turned the corner at the angle he stopped in amazement: his own cherished funk-hole had vanished

completely: in its place a cavern had been blasted in the trench, and a great heap of earth was piled up by its side. 'Is anybody hit?' he asked.

'Only them biscuits, sir,' chirped Private Millett.

'Must 'av given that shell a nasty shock,' murmured his neighbour, still nursing his damaged molar.

Aubrey had been clearing out the houses systematically and his treasure-trove began to take visible form. First of all a couple of cigars—'From Mr. Aubrey to Mr. Broadchalk, and 'andle 'em careful.'

'Watch the detonators, sergeant. Don't you pull them strings.'

Next a dozen prisoners, some bearded, big fellows, made ridiculous by their ill-fitting clothes and pill-box forage caps. There had been more of them, but it took a couple of bombs to persuade them to leave the cellars in which they were hiding. Behind them walked a lance-corporal who had been told off to escort them to the rear.

The machine-gunners came up to the line, carrying one of the two precious Lewis guns that the battalion possessed. 'That shows somebody knows where we are, anyhow,' said Broadchalk to Ennis. 'Perhaps our guns will open up and we can get a move on to-morrow.'

They examined through their glasses the long line of uncut wire which lay like a brown stretch of stair carpet in front of the German trenches.[1] 'It doesn't look as if it had been knocked about much, Babe, does it?' remarked Ennis.

As he spoke the guns started: the men jumped to their feet to watch the fun. Our gunners were sending over high explosive, and were making good shooting.

[1]A strong position called Pekin Alley, which connected their first line at Mad Point with Pekin Trench, their second prepared position immediately in front of Haisnes.

It was the first sign of artillery support from the rear, and the men cheered to see the shells travelling in the right direction at last.

The German snipers closed down too. Broadchalk sent off two men with twenty water-bottles to search the houses in the hope of finding a tap, for thirst was now becoming a serious problem; the bully beef and hard biscuits had added to their troubles. The good Hugo too was leaving a nasty, acrid deposit on the back of the throat. The sunshine also was a mixed blessing, for while it dried their clothes and cleared the trench of mud, it converted that mud to dust and used up the remaining moisture in their bodies.

Broadchalk sent a second party out to bring in a Lewis gun, which he had noticed lying in the garden in front of the parapet. Near it lay a couple of men and a corporal, who had been caught by a machine-gun as they dashed forward in an attempt to clear the remaining houses.

The main spring of the gun was broken, but they managed to rig it up sufficiently to fire one drum of ammunition, nor had they long to wait for a target.

Broadchalk had noticed a strange reluctance among the German snipers to fire at the good Hugo, so that he was able to clamber over the parapet and ensconce himself in the evergreen, from which he had a slightly better view of the enemy line.

The British guns had stopped, and the Germans were taking measures to cope with any attack that it might prelude. A working party were busy throwing a machine-gun sap out into their wire: the rise and fall of a shovel: the gleam of a bald head: a grey spiked helmet. Sergeant Piper handed the machine-gun up with the care of an inexperienced navvy burying a depth charge.

Would the spring hold long enough for that drum? It did. The bald head, the shoveller and the helmet: all three fell simultaneously, like corn to a sickle.

The German guns, possibly stirred into action by the gnat that had stung them from the shelter of friend Hugo, started a serious bombardment of the whole line: for two hours they hurled shrapnel at the narrow trenches held by the Fusiliers; and as a result of their bombardment they chipped a piece out of Sergeant Piper's little finger with a splinter of brick from one of the houses.

At first the din of the bursting shells drove the platoon into its funk-holes: the parapet shook and chunks of earth fell down into the trench through the vibration. But soon it became apparent that there was little except noise to fear; the fuses were too short and the shrapnel was bursting too high: also the shells were made of very inferior stuff. Large chunks of a red-hot coke-like substance landed in the trench, and the men passed their time in seeing who could pick up the largest and hottest piece. One of these chunks landed on Broadchalk's head and hurt him less than a well-aimed clump of turf: another, a jagged piece of metal this time, tore a hole in the peak of his cap—a nastier customer altogether.

The bombardment had a salutary effect; it touched the men's vanity and filled them with a certain indignation against the disturbers of their Sabbath evening's calm. As soon as it had ceased they rushed to the parapet, and were rewarded by three successive waves of attack, none of which reached within a hundred yards of them. The few survivors of the attacks scuttled back to their trenches, and were treated to another bombardment by the British guns.

It was dusk by the time the third wave had been shot away: a chill came up with nightfall, a heavy dew that settled upon them and set teeth chattering and fingers shaking; hungry bodies cannot keep out the cold.

'Haul your belts in a peg,' said Broadchalk: 'it will warm you up.'

Private Millett, who had no holes left in his belt and had a waist that a tight-rope walker would have envied, surveyed his stomach ruefully.

Thirst was a fiercer enemy than Hunger; it stunted their brains and made them stupid: sentry-go was the cure, for it took a man's mind off food and water; and they had to be alert. At any moment a fourth wave might sweep across, a wave that in the darkness could reach within fifty yards before it was seen—and there was no wire to protect them.

Broadchalk sent out patrols—the men were eager to go, for movement promised warmth, and the tension of no-man's-land took the mind off a sinking stomach and a swollen throat. They reported all clear in the houses and gardens on the left front, and as far as the enemy wire.

After midnight a sapper officer came up to the trench.

'I don't like your position, and I want to move you, but it's too late now. I'll rig up a temporary wire to stop you being rushed and will try and do better to-morrow.'

'Aren't we going to attack to-morrow?' asked Broadchalk.

'No. They're more likely to attack you. It looks as if they're concentrating for a big counter-attack. You're not so bad here, but your left is right in the air.'

So that was that. Broadchalk watched the sappers run a protective fence of two strands of barbed wire six feet in front of the trenches. That would save them being

rushed—he had not realised that being rushed was possible.

'If you could get anybody to send us up some water —or rations—'

The sapper officer, who had come to wish him good-luck after the wiring was completed, stared at him in amazement.

'You don't mean to say that you fellows have no water!'

Broadchalk glanced at his watch. 'Not for forty-four hours,' he answered. 'We've eaten our iron rations, too. So if you see anybody—'

The remaining three hours before dawn were cheerless, cold and dreary. Broadchalk's eyelids were heavy: a misty drizzle of rain accentuated the cold: there was nothing to wait for now except the German attack. That it would succeed was out of the question: the main hope was that they would come thick and straight and in the open: there were too many damned obstacles on the left front. Every man acted as sentry unbidden: Broadchalk inspected rifles—for the damp clay tended to clog the bolts—and dropped a hint or two. 'Aim low and pick your men: you've plenty of time. They can't rush you. If they look like reaching the wire get out and go for them. Don't wait for orders.'

He looked at his watch. It was half-past four. 'Stand to!' he shouted. If only he had a machine-gun now—one Lewis gun resting across Hugo's hospitable mound!

## VII

They came as large shadows in the grey mist that hung over the earth: they ran diagonally across the front, each man for himself: they ran as men who have

never seen a running track: some in spiked helmets, some in fatigue caps: and they fell one by one. A fat man, hit in the leg, hopped back to their trenches with the help of a fatter friend, their arms entwined about each other's necks. A bullet hit the friend in the rear; he leaped into the air and bowled over his comrade.

Of that first line half-a-dozen reached the shelter of the houses and dropped into Corons Alley, a shallow trench on Trevor's left.

The men had fired as one shoots at a fair: with yells of laughter and cheers—some firing from the shoulder.

Again a second line; again that melting away, again half-a-dozen men reached the trench.

A third attack, shot to nothing before it had reached its own wire.

'Wouldn't you like a shot, sir?' asked Private Brig solemnly, offering his rifle.

Broadchalk, who had two fronts to watch and was jumping backwards and forwards in an attempt to miss nothing on either, shook his head with a smile.

'That's given them something to think about,' he mused. He was worried about those dozen men who had reached the communication trench and could only hope that Trevor had got them.

''Am an' eggs is what I'd like,' said Private Millet. 'And more heggs than 'am! Did yer see me 'it that fat 'Un in the bum?'

'I saw yer knock that bloody weather-cock off the church steeple.'

''And me the coffee, and keep yer thumb out of the saucer.'

Broadchalk moved down the line to see Morell and report.

Things were not going too well on the left. Trevor's

platoon had had the same success as Number Eight, but against that uncertain flank the Germans had attacked in great numbers, and it was impossible to judge to what extent they had been held up.

Broadchalk found Morell worried but cheery. 'We'll get the guns on to those houses,' he said. 'I'll come along with you and see the Second in Command. Keep an eye out for snipers, and watch the windows of the houses.' They worked their way back slowly, for the trench was narrow.

Ennis joined Broadchalk, and they sat side by side discussing the situation. The snipers were making the most of their chances. The two platoons of A Company had lost their only subaltern, shot through the head: Aubrey had been wounded between the eyes and had been taken back to the rear, temporarily blind.

As the morning dragged on things became hotter. The bombardment was incessant, and under its cover small parties of Germans made their way over towards the left flank, offering but a glimpse of a target. Men began to fall fast, though Number Eight bore charmed lives.

By eleven o'clock the Germans had occupied a large stretch of trench between Trevor and the remnants of the Northants: they were separated from him only by a traverse of sand-bags and earth which he had hastily thrown up and manned with the one Lewis gun available; and then the British guns opened, not on to the houses, nor on that stretch of trench occupied by the Germans, but slap on to Trevor! They knocked his trench to pieces and decimated his platoon.

Sergeant-Major Bakewell, an old spindle-legged veteran regular from South Africa, set out alone for the rear to get into touch with the gunners and stop their

havoc. When it was obvious that he had been hit Ennis followed, making for the Dump, in the hope of finding an Observation Officer. Instead he found a major, sitting on a pile of slag, swearing softly under his breath. His eyes lit up at the sight of Ennis.

'Can you tell me where the 73rd Brigade are?' he asked.

Ennis explained that he belonged to it.

'Thank God! I'm your new Brigadier, and I've just arrived.' They moved off together.

By this time the right had been driven in: the Germans had seized Slag Alley and the frontal defences of the Dump.

Broadchalk, thrust forward like a wedge, with a range of sight less than two hundred yards all told, was oblivious of what was happening to right and left. He concentrated on keeping down the snipers, checking any advances across his field of fire, and repairing the havoc played by the German guns in his trenches. Things were getting more and more lively: there was no time to be tired, hungry or thirsty: they worked hard, getting ready for the great attack that seemed imminent.

The British guns had lifted. One great salvo landed full on a large house to Broadchalk's left front, and the whole front of it fell away like a theatre curtain, showing a solid wedge of German infantry, packed tight in each room like woodlice under an old plank. Another salvo sent them hurtling for their lives, jumping to the ground from the second storey.

Broadchalk's platoon emptied its magazines into them, for they had no cover, and few of them survived to crawl back into safety.

Into this medley of shrapnel and bullets, Morell came running down the trench. 'Get your men out, Mr.

Broadchalk,' he shouted. 'You're cut off! Get those men out of that trench and make for the rear.'

'A' Company, left officerless, looked up in bewilderment.

Broadchalk jumped on to the parapet. 'You get those men out; I'll look after Number Eight,' shouted Morell. 'Come along, men, hurry up.'

The appearance of Broadchalk was the signal for the German infantry to open fire: it was the first real target they had had. Behind him the walls spattered and hissed with the smack of bullets: he felt them whizz past his head and body. For fifty yards he ran, shouting to the men, hauling one up by the hand: then he cut suddenly through one of the houses and came into the garden beyond, almost tumbling into Morell, who was running between the houses with what men from Number Eight he had been able to collect.

There was no time to lose. The front German line was rushing over; the Germans on the left had driven in Trevor, and were racing to close the gap: from the Dump there came the slow relentless pop of the Hotchkiss.

At the corner of the houses they parted company. 'Get back to the trenches behind the Dump and hold them at all costs,' panted Morell. 'I'll see if I can do anything over here.' He ran off in the direction of the trenches that the Sussex had been holding in front of the Dump.

The machine-guns had cut A Company to pieces. The Second in Command, a sporting Colonel of the old school who had retired before South Africa, was riddled with bullets as he cleared the men out of their trenches: Broadchalk, with the remnants, set out to thread the narrow neck of the bottle—a long strip of ground

six hundred yards long—lined on one side by the Dump and on the other by the houses. The Germans were swarming: if they had thrown a line across the gap it would have been impossible to get through. A few rushed out from a house, but made off at the show of the bayonet: one fellow fired point-blank at Broadchalk from a doorway and missed him.

They ran and walked in spasms, keeping a semblance of a line, ready to turn if they were pursued. Somehow they slipped through the gap, and came out twenty strong. Broadchalk had a bullet through the heel of his boot and another through his cap: Sergeant Piper had gone, Private Brig, Private Millett, Corporal Hammett: Morell, Aubrey and, it seemed, Ennis and Trevor.

'They got Mr. Trevor, sir,' panted the man at his side.

As they came level with the Dump they saw in front of them, running from north to south, Dump Trench in the old German line, packed with the khaki balmorals of the Ninth Division. They jumped into a small communication trench with a sigh of relief.

## VIII

As they scurried along that communication trench in the direction of the balmorals a field message was handed down, passing from man to man; Broadchalk opened it eagerly.

'The Major-General commanding the ——th Division has the situation in hand. The Seventy-third Brigade will retire and occupy the trenches dug for them on the right.'[1] There was a strange sense of com-

[1] I believe this order was issued by the 28th Division, from Mazingarbe Church. It is quoted above from memory, after a hasty perusal in trying circumstances.

fort in the words. Broadchalk's confidence, during that dash for safety, had been on the wane: now to his confused and stupid mind there came order once more: things were moving according to plan, a general had the situation in hand—he found himself marvelling at the efficiency of any man who could control such a turmoil and make his dispositions on a leaf torn out of a Field Service Pocket Book. He sent the message to the rear, in the hope that it would reach Morell.

Suddenly the trench was jammed, and further progress was impossible. Broadchalk, who was in the rear of his men, jumped out of the trench and ran forward to see what the matter was. He found a couple of Scots sentries, their bayonets at the present, engaged in a heated altercation with one of his lance-corporals.

'They won't let us through, sir.'

A subaltern was standing behind the Scots sentries.

'What in the hell does this mean?' asked Broadchalk.

The subaltern shrugged his shoulders. 'My instructions are not to let anybody pass down this communication trench without a written order,' he said.

Broadchalk saw red. 'Damn it,' he cried. 'You passed the written order down to us yourself, not two minutes ago.'

The subaltern shrugged his shoulders and murmured something unintelligible.

'Where's your company commander?' gasped Broadchalk. On getting no answer he stared helplessly about him. The small trench was hopelessly jammed. A fresh batch of Fusiliers and Sussex, who had worked their way back from the Dump, were clustering in a knot in the rear, and even as Broadchalk noticed them a German machine-gun from one of the houses snapped greedily at the morsel set before it, and, having wiped out the

group, started to work systematically up the trench. He doubled back and rallied the survivors. 'Come on,' he shouted. 'Out of that quick.' They sprang forward once more, and doubled across the British front for a hundred yards.

'Here ye are, laddies!' bawled out a voice. It was from a giant Scots sergeant, blood-brother to the wounded giant who had stirred Broadchalk's soul in Beuvry that Saturday morning.

They scrambled into the trench, and found themselves among friends—the remnants of the Black Watch they had relieved on Saturday night.

'Well done the Fusiliers!' boomed the voice. 'Man, ye've held a tight corner fine.'

They passed along that front line, which was packed tight with men, so that packs stuck and bodies must be jammed against the trench in order to make a passage. It was each man for himself: each man had taken his place in the front line, and stood shoulder to shoulder with his newly-found mates, waiting for the blow to fall.

Here and there was a semblance of order, where the supports had had two days to organise, and had been watching the grim drama being enacted at the Fosse. In one such stretch of trench Broadchalk found some officers. 'Have you seen anything of the Fusiliers—73rd Brigade?' he asked.

'I think there are some up on the left. You'd better collect your fellows and stow them behind somewhere. We're hopelessly overcrowded as it is, and you've had your whack.'

Broadchalk took the hint. It had been an awful job, squashing his way through that jammed mass of men: obviously they were not wanted. It would give him

a chance to organise them, and see how many were left.

They turned down a communication trench, and came to a huge open expanse of fortification, fitted with deep dug-outs and broad firing steps. The trench was a good ten feet deep, and formed part of the group of German redoubts known as 'Big Willy.' A few wounded men lay clustered under a shrapnel-proof shelter—otherwise they might have been miles from a battle.

Broadchalk stood on the firing step and surveyed his men.

They were a queer score of ragamuffins: clay-covered figures, streaked with grime and blood: their rifles clay-splashed; their puttees, like brown paper leggings, stuck fast to their shins; their boots great paws of hard mud. There were Fusiliers, Sussex, and Middlesex of his own Brigade, and half-a-dozen Scotsmen who had lost their units in the first advance and fought ever since wherever they could find a man to lead them.

A Middlesex sergeant got them into shape and divided them into two sections.

Broadchalk climbed on to the top of the redoubt and took stock of the position.

Before him lay the village, now wrapt in a thick mist which was swirling towards them: the first damp of its drizzle fanned his face as he watched. Half right the ill-omened Dump loomed out of the mist, a grey formless monstrosity, full of the mystery that is inseparable from territory unsurveyed. What secrets might not be hidden in that mighty heap of slag? Rumour mentioned a tunnel and a shaft, by means of which the German gunners had fixed up observation posts before the battle with impunity: by means of which German infantry, having lured the British into a false sense of

acquired possession, attacked and bombed them from the rear. Now it lay with all its mystery unsolved, apparently in German hands again. Where was that line of trenches that had been dug for them on the right?

Broadchalk's lateral vision was limited to a hundred yards each way, even though he was standing on a pinnacle of the parapet. He felt strangely naked when standing on the top of the trenches in full view of the enemy.

The mist was getting thicker and thicker: was it to be their saviour, or was it to form a bank of cloud behind which the enemy could advance in mass? The Scotsmen were running no risk, for they kept up a steady fire: Broadchalk hauled his men out of the redoubt and gave them a bout of firing: it steadied them, and caused no danger to defenders of the trench in front, for they were on higher ground.

Suddenly he saw two figures standing together some sixty yards to his left. He stopped, looked again, and his heart leapt within him: it was Trevor—Trevor, talking to Parsons, the commander of C Company.

The whole of Broadchalk's responsibility dropped from his shoulders simultaneously with his first muttered gasp of joy. He shouted to his men, and set out at a run.

'What are you running for?' asked Trevor cheerfully, as Broadchalk arrived panting at his side.

## IX

The next hour was a nightmare of muddle and confusion. Parsons had lost his company, and had taken up his position on the parapet as the only field officer

known to be alive in the area. He was a big man, nearly stone deaf, and the enemy was barely two hundred yards away—to get orders was no mean feat: Broadchalk stood on his toes and shouted in his ear, and the snipers' bullets whizzed past his head continuously.[1]

The organisation of the line and the check of any suspicion of a rout was largely due to Parsons: he stood on the top of the trenches with his arms folded, a great monument of a man, collecting the men as they were driven in and guiding them to this or that trench. A faint smile played over his lips and hinted at the deaf man's oblivion to rattle and noise, or the infection of shaken nerves.

Broadchalk told him about the field message. 'You two had better prospect for a gap, and if you find it stay there. You can't do anything here, we're jammed solid as it is. If you find my company let me know!'

Ten minutes later he fell, shot through the head.

Parsons was right about the jam: it was even worse up on the left than opposite the Dump. For hours Trevor and Broadchalk wandered in that hopeless maze of trenches: soaked by the drizzle, cold, hungry, thirsty and tired: above all, unwanted. Once there was an attack: they lined the top of a redoubt and fired at the faint outlines that emerged from the mist, stumbled and came no further; once they were gassed—in a communication trench—and stood waiting in semi-yellow fog, striving to peer through the clouded mica window of their helmets, ready to jump out and rush at any enemy that might appear in its wake; once, in a rush forward through shrapnel and machine-gun fire—for

[1]Parsons was standing at the point where North Face starts back from the junction of Fosse Trench and Dump Trench. At this time Fosse Trench was strongly manned by the British.

they had abandoned groping in that maze of trench and moved in the open—Broadchalk felt a terrific blow on the left shoulder and was knocked clean backwards off his feet.

'They've got me this time,' he said to Trevor, who was standing over him.

'Where?'

'In the arm: I can't move it.'

They dragged him to his feet and Trevor took out his knife. 'What are you going to do?'

'Cut the sleeve off and tie you up,' said Trevor.

'It's—it's not bleeding,' answered Broadchalk. 'Leave it alone for a bit.'

He staggered forward, with his arm hanging limp by his side. 'Must have been a ricochet got me on the shoulder strap.'

A couple of men fell: a bullet crashed into Trevor's field-glasses, smashed one half and penetrated his breeches without breaking his skin. The force of the blow winded him.

Once they found themselves in the open, at the left-hand corner of the Dump, the mist swirling about their heads.

'How in the hell did we get here!' grunted Trevor.

'There must be a gap somewhere,' cried Broadchalk excitedly, 'and we have walked through it.

'Then we'd better get back and fill it up,' said Trevor.

A young Scots subaltern, with half-a-dozen men at his heels, suddenly appeared at their side.

'I can't stand it any more,' he shouted hysterically. 'I'm going to have a smack at 'em. Come on, boys.'

He dashed forward and was swallowed up by the fog. 'There's a brave man, anyway,' said Trevor. 'But what good can he do?'

They fell back in an attempt to find the gap in the line through which they had passed, but with no success; the trenches were as densely held as ever.

'You fellows will get your heads knocked off if you aren't careful,' grumbled a voice. It came from a Sussex company commander, who with a dozen men was occupying a communication trench leading into the thickly manned front line.

For an hour or more they sat and talked to him. At his side there lay a subaltern whose nerve had gone. Broadchalk looked at him anxiously, almost fascinated by him. 'Don't take any notice,' whispered the captain. 'He'll buck up in a minute. He had a bad time on the Dump.'

The sight of those broken nerves brought back both to Trevor and Broadchalk a realisation of their own physical condition. While they had been on the move they had had no time to think of themselves; there had been too much to do, too much to watch, and the tension of being shelled, gassed and attacked; also their quest, to find that strip of trench dug for them on the right, loomed largely in their minds. Now they found inactivity, helplessness, despair. They remembered how empty they were, how thirsty, how cold, how wet: that the enemy had turned them out of their position. In place of hope they were confronted by a realisation of failure and destruction.

'What are they going to do to us?' groaned Broadchalk. The idea that a battalion can be decimated and yet survive to fight again did not enter his mind. 'What will they do to us?' he repeated. 'Send us home, I suppose.'

His arm ached, his tongue felt too large for his mouth, his head swam, his eyes were craving to be

closed, his stomach was hollow, his skin seemed to be drawn painfully across his ribs. Sixty hours now since sleep, food and drink had been part and parcel of his life.

Trevor glanced at him anxiously, and from him to the broken subaltern, whose teeth were chattering with that helpless regularity that comes to a man in the grip of malaria.

'This cold has got hold of him,' explained the Sussex captain. 'He'll be all right in a jiffy.' All right! If only one could keep one's eyes off him: fall to sleep now and forget him!

'Reinforcements wanted on the right!' The message was shouted along the line.

The captain rose to his feet. 'Come along, Sussex,' he said, and pushed his way along the trench. 'I suppose you fellows are coming too,'' he called over his shoulder, as he disappeared behind a traverse.

Broadchalk and Trevor looked at one another in hesitation. An hour earlier they would have been on the parapet and running for the promised trenches: now it seemed different, with the chatter of those teeth rattling in their ears.

Broadchalk spoke first; feebly; listening to the words as they fell from his own lips, listening with as much surprise as his muddled head was capable of expressing. He could scarcely recognise his own voice, and marvelled as to where it came from and by whom it was prompted.

'That's only for the Sussex,' he said huskily. 'Perhaps if we worked our way back to the rear we might find the Fusiliers.'

He was two people now; two distinct personalities, a creature of a waking nightmare. One half of him had given way to an absolute weariness of mind and body:

the other still clung to a phantom of duty, still tried to hammer into his clouded mind and aching limbs the fact that there was a job of work to be done.

Trevor did not answer him immediately. They both stood in silence for a moment; then he said, 'I don't know'—casually, and with a start, as if he too had been surprised by his own words.

They gazed at one another in misery; pulled themselves together simultaneously, gathered their men and followed on the heels of the Sussex captain.

## X

It proved to be a false alarm; once more they started the old game of hide-and-seek. They found themselves among one of the Scottish companies and stopped to smoke a cigarette with a subaltern, sitting on the firing step of a deep broad trench. At their feet lay the body of a Highlander who had been shot in the head.

'How long have you been out?' asked Trevor.

'Only since this afternoon,' answered the subaltern. 'I've just arrived with a draft. I hear you fellows have had a bloody time.'

Broadchalk looked at him curiously: up till then he had not realised that they had had a bloody time. With food and water and some sense of order they wouldn't be doing so badly: if only they could find their battalion, get some sense of responsibility again, a job of work, a trench to hold. The trenches had no room for passengers—and that was all they were—bloody passengers, getting in everyone's light. Broadchalk put his thoughts into words.

The subaltern seemed surprised. 'You're supposed to be relieved, aren't you?' he asked.

Broadchalk explained about those trenches on the right; he was beginning to believe that that field message had been a hallucination. The suggestion that they had been relieved brought back the idea that had been generating in his mind ever since they had fled from that atmosphere of broken nerves. The line of trenches was a myth, the battalion had been withdrawn from the line and were waiting in support: that was why they couldn't be found. He said as much to Trevor when they set out on their search once more.

Night fell, a clear night after the fog, and with a full moon, a sky spangled with stars, and the intense cold of a hard autumn frost. The last spark of vitality was extinguished from their bodies, their brains were numbed: they were groping now, not searching.

They had found their way back to the old redoubt, and here they took shelter in dug-outs, with sentries posted in case there should be an alarm. For a couple of hours they remained there, perplexed, numbed and miserable. They dared not close their eyes, for that meant sleep, and sleep—they still remembered that they were a fighting unit faced by an enemy that might rush them at any minute. Sleep seemed treason. Here it was that their lack of experience failed them: had they slept then, even for a few minutes, they might have conquered the stupor and lack of will-power that was fast seizing them.

Towards midnight they made one more effort to restore their sanity. They collected all the walking wounded and sent them back under charge of a sergeant, who was to make some attempt to find out if Headquarters were in the rear—to look now, not for that line of trenches, but for the battalion.

The work of collecting the wounded helped them to

forget their fatigue: they sat on the top of the trenches, waiting for the patrol to return, talking to keep themselves awake, moving up to the front line from time to time to make sure that all was well. About them in a ring, like jackals before a tiger's kill, sat the men who had followed them blindly and obediently, ever since they had entered into that turmoil of trench.

A movement behind him caused Broadchalk to turn round: before him stood his batman, whom he had not seen since they had retired from the Fosse 8 position.

'Where have you been?' he asked.

'Sniping, sir; down there!' He waved his hand towards the right of the line. 'There's a big gap in the line and one or two of us have been holding it.'

At last! They jumped to their feet. There was no need for a command: the men clattered behind them as they followed their guide.

They found the trench, a shallow affair pushed forward in front of the line opposite the south corner of the Dump.[1] It was here that they must have crossed early in the afternoon, thinking it to be a communication trench. There were some twenty men in it spread over a hundred yards—sparse enough in comparison to the packed trenches to the north of them. By the time Trevor and Broadchalk had reached it they had collected some sixty or seventy men all told, enough to man the trench and pack reserves in the communication trenches. Their patrol returned from the rear and brought another twenty men with them, the only traces they had found of the battalion—but there was a line at last, and a job of work at last. It was half-past one.

[1]It ran parallel to Dump Trench, about one hundred yards nearer the Dump. The same distance separated it from the Dump.

A message came from their right. 'Who is holding those trenches on our left?'

Back went the answer. 'Royal Fusiliers.'

'Who is in command?'

'Lieutenant Trevor and Lieutenant Broadchalk.'

The words were passed down into silence: and, like peas running back into a cullender, came the reply in due course:

'Pass the word for Lieutenant Trifle and Lieutenant Bradley.'

They made their way down to the end of the line, and beyond, until they found a Sussex major and their friend the Company Commander.

'I am expecting an attack at dawn,' said the major. 'You two had better take over the line up to this point: the trench must be held at all costs. We shall probably be relieved at midday.' As he spoke they were conscious of a figure running backwards and forwards in a sap thrust out towards the enemy. This was the Sussex bombing officer at work, and that sap was Slag Alley, where the Germans were concentrating for an attack.

They returned to their lines, Broadchalk taking command of the right half and Trevor of the left.

There was little that could be done: the great task was to keep awake, to keep the body moving and the brain alive. If Broadchalk stood still for a moment his eyes closed and his brain stopped working: he felt the sudden gap as his thoughts slid away into an unconsciousness, clutched at them in the distance, held on to them and, just as he felt them sliding from his grasp, came to his senses with a jerk that half dislocated his neck.

This happened a dozen times or more. 'Here I am with a job at last, and I can't keep awake,' he muttered.

He looked about him and picked out the least weary of the men under his command.

'You keep by my side,' he said. 'Every time you see me falling asleep give me a jab in the ribs.' The man did not smile: there was nothing funny in the command.

They started to clean their rifles, for many of the bolts had been jammed by the mud freezing over them.

Two o'clock. Two-thirty.

A sudden thought came to him that they themselves might attack at dawn, and forestall the Germans: a kind of second sight, for he felt eerie and strange, as if he were not seeing all things clearly. He brought up his reserves and packed them tightly in the communication trench. 'As soon as we leave the trenches you must occupy them, give us a minute or two's start, and then follow,' he said. He put a sergeant in charge of them and returned to spend those last two hours before daylight, with his newly appointed orderly at his side, nudging his arm every few minutes.

## XI

It happened very suddenly, just as he was clutching at consciousness and fighting the black mists that descended upon his brain. A cheer from behind sent him spinning round, and simultaneously to his right a line of British dashed up cheering to the trenches, jumped them and sped on towards the Dump. We were attacking then, as his instinct had forewarned him!

The Sussex major blew his whistle and waved his arm.

'Come on,' Broadchalk shouted, and scrambled out of the trench. He had much ground to make up, for the company of the Berkshires—who had been pushed up to recapture the Dump—had a good start. He was only

conscious that at last the tide had turned, that those hours of indecision were over: he must dash on and get in front: that was his place. He drew his revolver as he ran.

He saw the Sussex captain pitch forward on to his face and lie still: then he too pitched forward, and landed full on his stomach. For a moment he thought he was hit, but it was only a strand of wire that had coiled round his ankle. He had lost more ground, but he made it up and got into the front of the charge about twenty yards from the Dump. Where were they going? where would they stop? The thought never came to him: he was just one of those three hundred men who had been chucked at the enemy and could only come to rest with their bayonets in their targets' bellies. There is no thought of repulse or successful opposition in the minds of a line of charging infantry: only a roar from each throat—parched and unparched—as they swept up the precipitous side of the slag heap.

Over the edge they found the machine-guns playing breast high and felt the sing of the bullets about their ears. The men each side of Broadchalk flung up their arms and toppled backwards like stormers in an old print, thrust down from a castle rampart.

They rallied on the slag heap and pushed forward again.

'Where are you, Sergeant-Major?'

'Here I am, sir!' These were regulars, who had fought since the tail-end of the Aisne.

Wraiths in spiked helmets—the cloth covers shining white in the moonlight—were dashing for safety on all sides before them, like disturbed earwigs under a rotten tree stump.

A roar went up from every throat; some fired their

rifles, others shouted curses, called to the enemy to stand and face the music. There was a pause while they shouted in derision, then the whole line swept forward with a shout.

Broadchalk heard Trevor's voice to his left, saw the Berkshires' sergeant-major running forward on his right; shouted himself and ran forward too for a few paces, until he was brought to a halt by a figment of his worn-out brain.

He saw it in a flash, as clearly as if he stood in broad daylight, and he knew that he was wide-awake, heard the sound of his own voice, saw the Webley revolver clutched in his own hands.

On his right an arc light stood, burning from the top of a green iron pole. In front of him, on two lines of rails, stood two strings of closed goods-wagons, stretching unbroken across his front—he could see the smoke-begrimed couplings, the rusty brake-bars, the white letters 'G.N.' shining in the light of the arc lamp. And as he watched he realised that he was in Wood Green goods yard! He stopped dead in amazement and stared about him; it was true, the trucks were there, a solid barrier to his advance. A couple of men ran forward on his right, ran straight through the trucks and were swallowed up by the wooden walls, as if they had passed through a curtain. He looked wildly about him: 'Sergeant Hall,' he shouted. 'Make those men go between and not through the trucks!'

The sergeant stared at him stupefied, and as suddenly as it had had birth the vision disappeared; he was left to stare at the sergeant blankly.

'My God, I'm seeing things,' he muttered softly: hushed by the sense of his own incompetence. He rushed forward again, leaving the sergeant to imagine

what he would, and as he moved the sergeant pitched forward dead.

'Half right, half left!' shouted the Berkshire subaltern, 'and line the edge of the Dump.'

They split into two parties and wheeled, Trevor going to the left and Broadchalk to the right.

'Where are those bombers? Bloody Hell! Where are those bombers?'

It was the sergeant-major: there was a catch in his voice as he realised that his bombers had been caught by the machine-guns, that the attack was doomed to failure.

The German guns had opened, the top of the Dump was one roaring furnace of bursting shrapnel and high explosive; snakes of smoke and coal writhed into the air as the gunners found their range; the machine-guns mowed the ground like scythes, raked it from side to side: men were falling fast; that band of three hundred men was reduced to a hundred in as many seconds—and still no further sign of the Germans.

They dashed forward to the edge of the Dump and flung themselves down in a firing-line. The sergeant-major doubled back in quest of his bombers.

In the trench running round the bottom of the Dump stood the Germans, firing from the shoulder at a target twenty feet above them: and no bombs! Four bombers could have cleared those trenches in a few seconds; now the infantry lay helpless, and, as a man thrust forward his head and shoulders to take aim at the enemy below, a bullet found him, fired at twenty feet. The hundred men were already fifty.

Over their heads, the height of a standing man's breast, the machine-gun bullets chattered; in front and below lay certain death.

Broadchalk watched, fascinated. He kept his head over the edge, gazing at the Germans, firing with his revolver whenever he saw one take aim. He emptied all six chambers, and waited.

'Can't we charge them, sir?'

'Lie still!' shouted the Berkshire subaltern. He rose to his feet and a bullet hit him: Broadchalk heard the gurgle of blood in his throat, heard the drumming of his heels and the last choke—then silence.

The fury burst out once more. The man next to Broadchalk was shot through the head, and rolled over on top of him: the man on his left was hit in the leg and started to whimper.

Broadchalk sat up, waiting for the shot that should end it all: there were only ten men alive.

A succession of crashes and bursts of flame in the line heralded a new danger: this was a new kind of shell to Broadchalk and at first his benumbed brain did not take in its significance.

'They're bombing us!' shouted one of the survivors.

Broadchalk looked quickly over the edge: the Germans were thicker than ever and were shouting in excitement. He saw them lobbing bombs gently up towards him. A German shouted at the sight of him and threw a bomb. Broadchalk lay flat and it burst behind him.

'Get back twenty yards!' he shouted. 'Get into shell-holes.'

They scurried back beyond range and lay in the shell-holes. There were four men with Broadchalk and they took it in turns to watch.

The shelling had died down, and the bombing had ceased: the Germans were waiting for dawn before they

should collect their trophies. A long line of dead men hung like a fringe along the edge of the Dump.

The man who had been hit in the leg—a Scots corporal who had joined in the attack—lay at Broadchalk's side and started to whimper. 'Oh, sir. Oh, sir!'

'Hold on, boys,' shouted Broadchalk. 'The supports will be here in a jiffy.' He turned to the Scotsman. 'Let's have a look at that leg,' he said.

He started to unwind the puttee: then stopped. 'Take off the puttee yourself,' he said kindly, for the man was frightened and wanted a job of work badly. The corporal obeyed.

'Why, it's—it's nothing. Where's your field dressing?' He felt strangely calm, as if he were inspecting kit.

The man tore away his dressing. 'Put some iodine on it, and then we'll tie it up. That's better. How do you feel now?'

'Fine, thank you, sir!'

'Good. We've only got to hold on a little longer.'

Broadchalk sat up and looked around.

The simple action of tieing up the man's leg had helped him too; he could see the heads of a couple of men in a shell-hole a few yards away. 'It's all right,' he called. 'Sit tight and watch the edge: let them have it if they come over.'

## XII

In the undisturbed silence of that vigil Broadchalk felt his eyes grow heavy, heavier than ever before: his body ached and his head throbbed. He recognised once more that consciousness was slowly deserting him: he grunted, and came to life with a sudden and painful jerk.

He could hardly believe his eyes! Behind them, in perfect alignment, their bayonets gleaming, their legs moving in perfect time, first right then left, shoulder to shoulder across the full width of the Dump, came a line of British infantry, slowly, inexorably, each man staring at him. He felt the hypnotism of their stare, saw that they were fresh, clean men, without the smoke and grime of battle upon them. He swallowed hard, moistened his swollen throat and pointed at them with his empty revolver. 'There they are!' he shouted. 'Look, there they are!'

The men in the shell-hole looked round in bewilderment—followed the direction of his arm and saw—nothing.

Broadchalk watched amazement creep over their faces, heard a muffled oath, caught a new whimper from the wounded man, and turned in terror to see what new mockery his brain had contrived for him.

The Dump was empty, but for the dead!

He sat quietly, trembling: not a word was spoken. Desire for sleep, sleep at all costs, seized him once more: he struggled to evade it, but hadn't the power to resist any longer.

A shout at his side awoke him. 'They're coming, sir!' He opened his eyes wearily, and saw that the Dump was grey with the first streaks of dawn.

Men were shouting in German one to another beyond the edge of the slag heap. 'Stand by!' he called out, and loaded his revolver with the reserve six rounds from his pouch.

They waited in silence, their rifles trained on that edge of slag, that stood out black against the grey mist.

The shouts increased: spread from side to side, ran like a flame on a bonfire soaked in paraffin.

A burst of shouting in their rear and the clatter of running men. They turned and found a body of Germans not ten yards away, who had raised a yell at the sight of them.

Broadchalk saw a man rushing at him, saw his bayonet pointed full at his throat, lashed out with his ash stick and felt a crash on his head. Then a German from behind seized him by the arm and ran him down the slope.

# FRANK HONYWOOD, PRIVATE

*by*

ERIC PARTRIDGE

s

DEDICATED

*to the memory of*

HOWARD PHILLIPS

*Corporal in the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade,*
*who, having gallantly served, gallantly died at*
*Mont St. Quentin in September* 1918

# FRANK HONYWOOD, PRIVATE

## I: AUSTRALIA AND EGYPT

THE outbreak of War had, for the Colonies, a splendid news-value, but its full significance was realised only when England's participation was announced. Naturally that participation at first meant much more to English immigrants than to native-born Colonials. In Australia, for example, it took a few days for camps to be established, but, once it was known that one could enlist, enlistment was rapid, especially for the Light Horse. Regular staff officers got good jobs (Australia had had compulsory training for some years: at Kitchener's instigation); some were kept behind much longer than they wished. The heavy Australian artillery arrived in France quite early in the War, for it consisted of trained men; otherwise, except for a few specialists, the Australians did not reach France until March 1916. Not that they were idle elsewhere.

Compared with England, Australia was very fortunate for the first eight months, for, while men were going away in thousands, no casualty lists brought realism into that atmosphere of enthusiasm. Reports of the Allies' casualties and the grossly exaggerated reports of the enemy's casualties meant, somehow, so little; death was invested with glory, not with pain, not with bitterness, not with sorrow. Those who enlisted before Christmas 1914 feared lest the War should be over before they sailed; this fear prevailed well into 1915, though it was wearing pretty thin among the sceptical.

Scepticism prevented balderdash from becoming rife, and it certainly did good service when one of its exponents mentioned, early in 1916, that if the reported German casualties were correct the whole German army was 'wiped out': yet the war seemed still to exhibit indubitable signs of existence. Scepticism due to experience pervaded Australia later than England, but when it did adverse criticism was more outspoken. Not only, however, were there no Australian casualty lists until April 1915, when the landing at Gallipoli stirred the Australian public more, I think, than any previous event in its history, but also no wounded nor maimed nor blinded soldiers appeared until June: even then they were so few that their sobering influence was almost negligible. It is doubtful whether the gloomy stories of thousands of soldiers have much effect on the civilian population; for the down of romance to be rubbed off, death must remove a husband or a lover, a brother or a lifelong friend. It is much the same with soldiers. When, for instance, the new troops in Egypt saw the wounded there, they listened, agog with excitement, to their accounts of things done and things suffered, but death seemed far away; death was not feared, because not thought of; if mentioned, it was not actually present and not, therefore, a contingent possibility. In Australia, however, one noticed that, immediately the first Gallipoli casualties were published, a somewhat different temper supervened; no fear touched the soldiers waiting to depart, but a certain seriousness appeared; and the scenes of parting had a touch of tragedy. It was in the women that one noticed it first: an indescribable something came into their eyes, perhaps a shadow of pain, perhaps a premonition, perhaps the mass-sympathy of women, on whom devolves the

burden of waiting, the quiet heroism of carrying on while, as they are poignantly aware, the dear one whose letter, written, it may well be, weeks before, has just arrived, full of cheery greetings and happy expectancy, lies now, for all they know to the contrary, in an unknown grave that is no grave at all.

This stage in the psychology of Australia (and, for that matter, New Zealand) had been reached when Frank Honywood left Brisbane with the —th Battalion, in the Seventh Infantry Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.).

On the declaration of war Honywood was under age. He was in his first year at the University of Queensland as a student working at the Classics Honours course under that delightful scholar, Professor Michie, and Cholmeley, the well-known editor of Theocritus; the former was much too tolerant to urge anyone to enlist, for (as I imagine) he realised that this was to usurp a grave responsibility; Cholmeley, however, was always proselytising others and bemoaning his own fate—finally he got to England, only to perish on the Russian expedition, after the Armistice. If Michie was, and happily is, a profound and delightful scholar in English literature, Cholmeley was more interested in European literature in general; both were ardent advocates of the charm of the Ancient Classics. When Cholmeley had a congenial subject (he would rise to eloquence more easily on Greek than on Latin themes), his eyes flashed, he spoke with a fiery conviction and effective appositeness. Nobody sent so many Queensland undergraduates to the war as this versatile scholar, whose regard for England resembled a lover's passion; in despite of many years in the Colonies he looked always to the country of his birth. Far from happy was

his history, yet his spirit remained indomitable: his versatility in scholarship no less excited admiration than his habits of 'sporting' constantly the one old tie, smoking the one old pipe, and wearing the one old gown aroused the interest of the undergraduates. The highest praise he ever gave Honywood for a Greek composition was: 'I suppose it might be a lot worse,' but when the latter enlisted he became quite enthusiastic: 'The only thing to do; there might be a lot more doing the same thing.' What a scholar was lost in Cholmeley! But I believe that the death he met was the death he preferred. An outspoken enthusiast, he acted on his enthusiasms.

But it was Professor Michie who had been concerned in allowing Honywood, in order that he might earn some much-needed money, to teach during the August vacation and for a while afterwards. The pupils were always delighted when a history or a geography lesson enabled him to drag in the War. But as yet he had no thought of enlisting; there seemed to be no urgent need of men. Throughout the long Vacation (end of November to middle March) he worked at his Greek and Latin. He began his second year without the least intention of joining-up. But the departure of several friends for Egypt, the contrast of the mixed lawn-tennis that he was playing with the strenuous life of those friends, the gradual realisation that this was not a war to be finished a few months ahead, that men did take things seriously enough to offer gladly their careers, implicitly their lives, these and other causes rendered him dissatisfied with his present industrious but secluded existence. In times of peace the student life was all very well, in fact it had much in its favour: in time of war it was, except for the unfit or the indis-

pensable, little less blameworthy than Nero fiddling while Rome burned.

So thinking, so feeling, he went one Thursday morning in April to the Victoria Barracks. How embarrassed he was to strip, along with half-a-dozen others, for examination! For a fleeting second he had a misgiving that his personal freedom was at an end; later, of course, seeing that the individual formed a mere part of an organisation, he overcame aversion, and extracted what freedom he could. Having coughed, said *ninety-nine*, and committed other absurdities and 'eye-washes,' he heard that he was quite fit, was given three days in which to arrange his affairs, and ordered to report at the Enoggera camp on Monday morning. Occasionally, one or two men, changing their minds, did not report; nor, so far as I know, were they sought for. A man unwilling at that stage was bound to be an infernal nuisance afterwards, so he was left unmolested.

The camp at Enoggera (an outer suburb of Brisbane) was chiefly for the infantry. It consisted, in the main, of rows of tents with an orderly-room tent at the end of each row. One washed at some troughs fifty yards away. The weather was still warm, and no one suffered from the rapid change to primitive conditions. Honywood found the tent rather uncomfortable at first, but that was merely because he had never before slept or lived in one. He made a point of getting a bath in town as often as he could. The physical exercises and squad drill did not trouble him. After all, he had been only four weeks in camp when, on May 24th, he left Brisbane with the battalion; rifles were handed out six days before embarkation, and with them the kit and web-equipment; this last gave Frank a cold shiver every time he looked at it; at last, however, he learnt to deal with it

to his own satisfaction—though not always to that of his officers; it was only in Egypt that he became expert. But then he had always been rather a fool with his hands.

Everyone was tremendously excited to leave port on this great adventure, and nearly everyone considered that he was doing the right thing. The feeling that the Allies had full justice on their side did not make them bloodthirsty: Honywood doubts whether he saw any real bloodthirstiness, except in the instance of a man who, mad with drink, burned to avenge his twin-brother. To quit one's country for a long time (leave taking one only to England) had a sobering effect, but even that, augmented, in the case of many, by a personal grief, could not quell the elation that tugged at all their hearts. The passage to Sydney was uneventful. There they landed and remained for a week in camp at the Show Ground; they slept in the sheds that had formerly sheltered a score of prime cattle. Physical exercises and an occasional short march comprised all the duties, leave being very freely accorded. Friends were visited, sight-seeing was general: even others than Sydneyites admit the charm of Sydney. Honywood's most vivid memory is of a short, brisk march before breakfast through the neighbouring park lands; the early-winter morning was fresh and cold, yet not sharp; the air, without bite, had an invigorating tang; the sun shone clear, though weak, through the trees, merely to be alive was a joy, young legs moving freely, easily, young eyes seeing every frosted leaf aglisten, young voices singing some foolish song, young hearts astir with their entry into war, war which, next to love, has most captured the world's imagination. The glamour and the ardour explain why, when on their return to the ship, marching smartly through Woolloomooloo (a poor

inner suburb, and a mighty rough one), they heard a wrinkled, ragged old woman exclaim, 'I do hope those Germans won't kill you all,' they merely laughed and thought it a good joke. The cheering of the onlookers was very real, danger was as the rumour of a thing unreal: that *they* should be killed was well-nigh impossible: of such stuff are the majority of heroes made.

From Sydney the transport proceeded direct to Port Adelaide, where it remained just long enough for a couple of hundred South Australians to embark. In those, the early days of the War, the departure of a troopship occasioned incidents that were stirring, pathetic, humorous, but, later, when the men realised more sharply to what they were going and when those left behind knew that there was at least a chance that this might be the last time they would see these men, something of tragedy was plainly visible; less of flag-waving and streamer-holding, more of quiet hand-shakes and poignant embraces. But the departure of a troopship was always a fine sight, quickening the pulse of the adventurous, plucking at the heart-strings of the sensitive; beyond the swish of the water were the over-tones of grief and the undertones of restrained suffering.

Contrary to expectation, the Bight behaved most considerately, so that 'it did not,' to quote a wag, 'impair the great Australian bite.' At Fremantle, where the ship stopped for fresh vegetables and other stores, the men were marched to the outskirts, and beyond, in the morning. Few had sufficient energy left to go wandering through the town in the afternoon: as the commanding officer had doubtless foreseen. This was the first of the numerous instances that Honywood was to notice of the shrewdness of military arrangements. Military dispensation was rightly directed at the

prosaic, or, to put it otherwise, at some ninety-five per cent. of the men. The remainder consisted of the imaginative, the highly strung, the sensitive, from whom spring the majority of the world's thinkers, artists, writers, but who, as soldiers pure and simple, are not superior to their more humdrum fellows. When intelligence was required, this minority came into its own; but apparently intelligence was seldom required, and when it was it was usually brushed aside. Such scouting and flouting of intelligence did not make it any easier for those possessing it, for they already suffered keenly; their courage was sheer will overcoming those sickening fears which a lively imagination evokes, whipping horrified minds to action, riding roughshod over nerves lacerated and hypersensitised. Morally, the courage of such men is superior to that of the prosaic, sturdy, and dull; but the outcome of all courage is the same and therefore, whatever its origin, of equal practical value. The bravery of a delicate-minded, intelligent artist is no more valuable in war than is the bravery of a clod. That is one of the lesser condemnations of war, it is true, but let no high-brow belittle the work of the dull, honest fellows who comprise the greater part of every army, for though the latter suffered less intimately, much less agonisingly and maddeningly than the sensitive and intelligent, yet suffer they did; moreover, the most earthy and stupid of men, after long service in the trenches, became nervy and thus more sensitive and highly-strung. It was Honywood's lot to observe that several thoroughly ordinary, uninteresting men became almost intelligent, more alive to beauty, and actually more subtle of expression, more refined of feature. Except where shell-shock or madness resulted, genuinely active service

certainly raised the standard of intelligence, nor was this wholly, or even largely, due to intercourse with 'their betters.' Moreover, it elicited the finest moral qualities in all. Brought face to face with ultimate things men were not only stirred to their depths but widened in their sympathies and interests; protracted active service diminishes self-consciousness until it becomes a mere vestige of civilisation; in the resultant reign of frankness and simplicity, men gave of their mental and aesthetic best; this condition, therefore, helped to increase the sensitiveness and the intelligence that were sharpened by constantly-recurring danger. Such considerations may faintly serve to indicate the complexity of war-psychology and the difficulty of arriving at a definite exposition of its myriad interactions, causes and results. Yet certain facile writers have succeeded in bluffing the public by their specious simplifications, partly because universality of suffering creates for authors an 'open Sesame' to all hearts, providing their touch be sincere.

Honywood, when he left Fremantle, however, could not have foreseen his experiences; never so much as in a soldier's life does the old saw hold true, 'It is best that we know not the future.' Life on that populous transport was pleasant enough. Ordinary drill was obviously out of the question, but physical and rifle exercises, inspections, and fatigues kept the men fit and just sufficiently busy; they had plenty of time to themselves, and this they employed in various ways, some playing crown-and-anchor,[1] chuck-ha'penny, or bank,

[1]A monograph could be written on this game, with especial reference to its vocabulary, which, lurid and graphic at the beginning of the War, acquired new terms and phrases suggested by an ever-widening experience of active service; some of these were cynical, picturesque, and *lived* to a remarkable degree. Such a monograph would constitute a very microcosm of war.

three games extremely popular amongst the Australian non-commissioned officers and men, while the first was the favourite of the rankers in the British Forces in general; (among the officers, it was bridge for the English, bridge and poker for the Colonials;) some yarning with their pals or writing letters or reading. Civil peculiarities had not yet approximated to a military norm; trade, professional and vocational mannerisms and gestures persisted as sharply as ever: such idiosyncrasies and characteristics never, of course, wholly disappeared, but, on a rough average, one may say that after a year's active service (if we date that from each man's 'baptism of fire') they become singularly unobtrusive. On that long run from Fremantle to Port Suez, communal life was seen at its healthiest. All sorts and conditions ate and bathed and slept together; a wag might be the centre of a group of two hundred; messes were so close that only the narrowest of passages were left between the tables; for three nights the holds provided a strange spectacle, with men sleeping on the floors, the benches, the tables, or in their hammocks slung at varying heights, the aspect being vaguely similar to that of a jungle. When they reached warmer latitudes, many slept on deck, but until this desirable thinning-out was made, the bustle preceding 'lights out' was equalled only by the clamour inseparable from meals and bathing parades. It was all noisy, boisterous, and good-humoured. Yet the crowding was not so marked as to prevent the formation of little groups of kindred spirits; friendships were cemented that would last till death did them part. Then, too, there was a certain amount of variety in the life. For instance, each mess consisting of a section (fourteen men), two mess-orderlies were appointed every day; this duty entailed

the getting of bread, butter and jam, occasionally pickles, salt and sugar from the stores; as well as the scrubbing and setting of the tables and the serving of the meals; the journey from cook-house to mess, if the weather were rough, required skill and caution, for almost-boiling tea or stew or porridge, carried in heavy dixies down none-too-easy companion-ways, was tricksy, especially if both hands were occupied, knees and elbows being used to stay or steady; if greasy stew or thin porridge were spilt on the metal steps, the difficulty was increased, and occasionally an orderly came to a sticky end at the foot amid the laughter and ribald jests of the seated hundreds. But Honywood remembers particularly an incident of another kind. Once in a long letter to a College friend he lapsed into French, which he wrote with a certain fluency (un-idiomatic and doubtless excruciating to Gallic sensibilities); there were three or four pages of this. He was duly summoned one Sunday afternoon to the orderly-room, where the company-commander, with the correct proportion of military gravity, asked if these pages contained treasonable or indiscreet matter. 'Neither, sir.' 'To tell you the truth, Private Honywood, I'm sure of that; but regulations are regulations. You must either omit those pages or put them into honest-to-God English.' This was done; all was well. Another incident, less remarked at the time but rather more significant, was his perception that, two messes away, there 'lived' an unusual soldier, who one night entertained his mess with some vivid tales of foreign lands; Honywood listened hard, for, though he did not strike an acquaintance till much later, he was deeply impressed by this man who dominated his fellows both physically and mentally. Such men helped to maintain the equable temper of the

troops in the tropics, trying enough at any time and no joke at all in a crowded transport; canvas air-chutes prevented the holds from becoming unbearable. The meagre supply of books went the round; no one in his senses left a good novel lying about. In Sydney, Honywood had bought several light novels, a volume containing the best of Victor Hugo's lyrics, another containing Chateaubriand's shorter romances; he picked up a battered *Beauchamp's Career*; borrowed a Tennyson, a Shakespeare, and a *Shakuntala* from Fred White, who, in A Company (Honywood was in B Company), had been at school with him; he managed to find a Scott, a Dickens and a Thackeray that he had not previously read, as well as such 'light-weights' as a Braddon, a Payn, a Gaboriau. One's reading was necessarily varied if one wished to read more than a book or two; to be squeamish or high-brow was out of the question. On the credit side, it is well known amongst old soldiers that the War introduced to the pleasures of reading many a man who, otherwise, would never have read anything better than a newspaper. Nor was this reading confined to novels; the contingency of death occasionally induced serious thoughts, and these often demanded, for their satisfaction, serious books: such an attitude did not necessarily run counter to, but might actually exist along with, that military cynicism which, becoming widespread during the bitter winter of 1916-1917, might be summed in the words, 'Eat, sleep, and be damnably merry if we can—for to-morrow we may be blown sky-high.' Where nothing except death seemed to be sure, thoughtfulness, save in the very strong-minded, the insuperably fastidious, and the impregnably religious, usually led the others, that is the half-baked, into the same frame of mind, the same outlook,

as that which characterised the thoroughly graceless, the lawless and the thoughtless.

Eventually, the troopship arrived at Port Suez, the men right glad to have done with the sweltering heat of the Red Sea. In a no less sweltering train they proceeded to Cairo; the journey was fascinating, for it disclosed a new world to the Australians. From Cairo, where they arrived as the sun declined, they marched to the huts lying about a mile from Heliopolis. Ranged in a long line, they were large, high and airy; luckily they were cool, for they had to serve as mess-rooms, places of recreation, and halls of instruction. Thirty yards away, on the Cairo side, were the tents, four or five deep; on the desert side, at about the same distance, lay the cook-houses and, perhaps fifty yards further out, the washing-places, with a couple of shower-baths, open to the sky but walled with bagging. The camp was situated on a dead-level plain, though low, arid hills stood less than a mile distant. There the battalion remained from mid-July until the first week of September. The Officer commanding Honywood's company was Major Currie, familiarly called 'Pat,' who, always spick and span, rapidly gained the affection of his men by his sense of justice and good-humour, his alertness, intelligence and courage; he later became Lieutenant-Colonel in charge of the battalion and finally Brigadier-General. The second in command of the company was Captain Grant, who, like Major Currie, had been a school-teacher; a very fine shot, an ardent soldier, a man among men, he was transferred in 1916 to the command of the Second Pioneer Battalion. In charge of No. 1 platoon was Lieutenant Robinson, whom Honywood knew slightly as a Queensland 'varsity man and a good batsman; as a lieutenant he

was known as 'Old Uniformity,' for he used to insist on that quality; he left the army with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, which he thoroughly deserved both for his keen, intelligent officering and for the courage that he first displayed on Gallipoli when he reconnoitred between the lines on nights sufficiently dark for so hazardous a procedure. The officer commanding No. 2 platoon (our private's) was Lieutenant Thomson, who in 1917, after an absence in England, was to have charge of B Company; one of his predecessors, gallant Captain Tom Hewitt, had been killed on July 29th, 1916; in 1915, the latter was in A Company with Fred White, who had, in 1908, been a pupil of his, at the same time as Frank, at the Toowoomba Grammar School. Hewitt had been a very efficient teacher (he came from the University of Sydney), though slightly sarcastic on due occasion. Another old T.G.S. boy was in A Company: Stuart Henderson, once a great pal of Honywood's, later a teller in the Bank of Queensland (even at school he excelled at figures), who was killed the same night as his old master. To complete this tale of Toowoomba's woe, so far as the —th Battalion was concerned, Fred White met his death in 1918 soon after he had been made lieutenant, thus illustrating the saying current among soldiers: 'One star, one stunt'; while a mutual friend of White's and Honywood's—all three had been pupil-teachers together at the South State School in 1910-1911—died, mortally wounded, a month or two earlier. Yet even when it is only a company that separates them, friends usually see little of one another on active service, and Honywood saw little of his. At Heliopolis the day's work was strenuous. At a quarter to five, reveille rang out, distinct and urgent on the clear

Egyptian air; half an hour later, a light snack and a mug of coffee. At a quarter to six the men fell-in, and from six till nine they were hard at it: physical exercises, section, platoon, or company drill, or route marches; the last being much preferred to drill. Battalion and brigade movements, which were not so bad, usually came in the afternoon, probably because that was a period of the day more suitable to the field-officers, who took an unkind delight in making wretched lieutenants scurry about like rabbits; but in a fairly extensive experience, Honywood never saw one of these battalion or brigade movements put into practice in actual warfare; the men didn't grumble, for they could hardly know how useless were these theoretical manœuvres. After the morning's 'spasm' (as it came to be called), a hearty clean-up, with breakfast at nine-twenty. At ten-thirty, verbal instruction, lasting an hour and a half, was given 'at the easy' in the huts. Dinner came at twelve-thirty. An extremely light afternoon tea was served by the orderlies at four-fifteen; in the interval after lunch, one did as one liked (except go to Heliopolis or Cairo); as it was midsummer and therefore scorchingly hot, the majority had the good sense to sleep. Cairo's siesta, when all shops were closed, was from noon till three o'clock, whereas the Australians' began and ended an hour later. How grateful to the men were those afternoon slumbers beneath the double canvas, lying there on a groundsheet spread on the sand! But from five o'clock until seven-thirty(occasionally until eight), more drill, or, as a variation, a rare turn on the rifle-range or competitions in the judging of distance or the passing of messages and other practical exercises. Honywood was a very poor shot at this period, partly because he had never handled any-

thing larger than a pea-rifle, with such targets as magpies, parrots, iguanas, and wombats (these last on moonlit nights as they squatted on the top branches of eucalyptus trees), and even of that he had done nothing for at least eighteen months. Yet he judged distances with the best. Twice there were night-manœuvres in the stony hills, and twice trench-digging, also by night, on the level sandy plain; on these occasions, the afternoon 'spasm' was omitted; likewise the drill next morning. The most remarkable features of the former operations were the number of men temporarily lost and the lack of surprise rewarding the surprise attacking-parties. If these lasted four or five hours, the trench-diggings occupied the whole night, the shifts being of two hours, turn and turn about. Memorable occasions, for the pure soft breezes of dawn were as wine, while against the neighbouring hills the clear first rays of the sun, rising with a modest majesty, invested all with something of earth's pristine glory: weary men stood erect, refreshed and elated. In Frank's mind then, as they are now, those two sunrises were connected with a sunset that graced them in the Red Sea, just after they had passed the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. The lofty, arid, forbiddingly deserted ranges on the port side, bathed in light, showed gold, orange and yellow, gradually darkening to an eerily bluish green and sombre auburn. Even the 'toughest' of the loungers ceased from their blasphemies, curses, oaths, and obscenities, and the most inveterate gamblers gave over: men whose mouths shrank from nothing, men of whose dicing and card-playing one might say, 'They were extremely keen, there was no dirty trick left untried'; for a few minutes they were in unison with their decent companions, who were in a marked majority. All voices were hushed;

indeed, hardly anyone spoke. The searching power and the profound appeal of this beautiful scene wrought more than any book, any preacher, any orator could have done. One got the feeling that here was true religion, without sect or dogma or controversy, nor was the impression weakened by the knowledge that were a religious significance suggested to the more lawless, they would immediately throw off the spell and fall to filthy denial.

At the camp, it was not all work. Leave was frequently given to either Heliopolis or Cairo; in point of fact, a pass to the latter allowed one to stay in the former, if, as rarely happened, one so desired, for Heliopolis is small, artificial and somewhat monotonous. Frank occasionally went with Fred White, more often by himself. He satisfied his conscience by visiting the usual 'sights,' which, to be honest, he thoroughly enjoyed, for they are better worth the seeing than most of the vaunted wonders of Europe. He took an especial interest in the native quarter, through which he wandered with some companion or other, the lonely man being always in danger there, above all at night. What a study in humanity! The age-old trades, plied with a quaint primitiveness; the roughness, shamelessness, cruelty and callousness of everyday life; the abrupt variations in architecture—an impressive temple amid squalid hovels, humble stalls jostling a garish café; handsome men and men of bestial countenance and form; hideous old women, whose old age, to inexperienced European eyes, would seem to comprise two-thirds of their life, and with them pretty girls, the majority of whom were either already prostitutes or easily persuaded to drive a casual trade in their facile charms; children of a rare beauty or else, more commonly,

blighted prematurely. Life at its most clamorous, mo earthy, most ribald—and yet wonderfully various, fc joy elbowed suffering, animal health displayed itse with proud indifference in the sight of disgustin disease; above ground encumbered with nameless filt there might wave an exquisite scarf of silk or a lovel piece of tapestry; murder prowled furtively at night, c flashed, in wrath, by day; trafficking flourished at a hours and seasons; thieving and whoring were prac tised, the one almost as openly, the other even mor obviously in daylight than in darkness. Native Cair repels and fascinates, cosmopolitan Cairo charm mainly because of its cosmopolitanism. Frank Hony wood saw a good deal of Cairo, for he was often sen there to perform some small commission requiring knowledge of French; on several occasions, he lef camp at six o'clock, was in Cairo by seven, and perhap had to wander about until he could obtain what h desired: to survey the natives at work in the cool of th early morning, when few Europeans were about afforded a deep pleasure. But all good times come to ar end, although, in this instance, the change was wel comed.

But, after all, there was a war on. Most of the men felt that they had had enough of drill on the desert, and as it wasn't a Cook's tour, Cairo could be left behind without pain. Preparations were at last made to go to Gallipoli, and they rejoiced. The majority regretted not having been at the landing, for they did not care to have to take a back seat while friends described that magnificently audacious exploit; although they didn't grudge them their privilege, and the spirit of emulation caused them to promise themselves to do their best when they should arrive.

One evening early in September, they entrained for Alexandria. They were extremely uncomfortable in those horse-trucks with which, labelled *wagon pour* 8 *chevaux ou* 40 *hommes*, they were to become familiar. Forty men without encumbrance would have been bad enough, but forty men with rifles and equipment made a little purgatory: yet, despite the difficulty of sleeping, one did manage to sleep a little until a bad dream caused someone's boot to dig into sore ribs, or an elbow to give a poke in the face. Soldiers, however, make the best of everything, and the source of enjoyment need not be physical: they forgot their aching limbs while, in the early morning, they passed through the Delta as the rays of the sun rendered beautiful the low-lying mists and glistened on water and reed: although there was nothing striking in the features of the water-cum-landscape, the very merging of land and water had its charm. Immediately they detrained at

Alexandria, they embarked on the transport that would convey them to Gallipoli. It was a small vessel, with little more than elbow-room, but the food was liberal and good. Especially did they enjoy the ship's bread, which bettered anything they had in Egypt, where they had lived quite well, for, in addition to the army rations, they received an allowance from the Greek Government. The food was naturally richer, though less varied, on the transport, and of course some pessimist made tactless remarks about pigeons being fattened for the killing. The voyage had its element of danger, since German submarines operated most actively in those waters. The troop-ship preceding theirs had been sunk, though its human freight escaped with the scare. A sharp look-out was kept; the officers held numerous inspections of rifles, equipment and rations; water-bottles were filled and examined several hours before disembarkation.

Mid-way on this transit, fraught with palpitating expectations (a couple of years later, the expectations might have been tinged with fear, or, at the least, with misgivings: but one was twenty years younger in 1915 than in 1917), Frank met Jim Hicks, the man who had so aroused his interest on the voyage from Australia.—They never said 'Jim' and 'Frank,' but 'Felipé' and 'James' respectively.—Honywood was enjoying Omar Khayyam, not for the first time, when Hicks, looking up from some equipment that he was cleaning vigorously, caught sight of the title and, with an appreciative grin, said: 'I wonder what that old pagan would have thought of this show? What a jolly quartermaster-sergeant he'd have made. *But was I sober when I swore?* I'd like the loan of Omar when you've finished with him—if you ever do!'

'Certainly; you shall have him soon. But don't lose him.'

There ensued much talk about Omar, and, by easy transition, more talk of all manner of subjects. A spark was struck, nor did it flicker and die, for fortune was less fickle than usual. Hicks, who, possessing wit, humour, and a versatile, penetrating mind, was irregularly, therefore charmingly, well-read, spoke with ease, vigour and picturesqueness. On his many travels (wanderlust was his ruling passion) he had fended for himself in all classes of society—and none, and always he observed closely. Honywood may have travelled little, known little of life, yet he shared his new friend's gift of observation; he had read widely, had a mind of his own, and, with tactful encouragement, could be brought to speak freely. Neither was prudish, neither priggish. The disparity of age (Felipé, thirty, being nine years the senior) meant nothing: it seldom means much when a fast, firm, delighted friendship arises spontaneously, wears well, and grows ever stronger: it is doubtful whether they thought of the matter at all. War, moreover, is a rare leveller of the ages of combatants. They had other differences: Felipé had always worked with his hands, sometimes at highly skilled occupations, whereas Frank had never done so; Felipé tended to materialism, but what a lovable pagan he was, while Frank tended to idealism, despite a decidedly realistic streak in his make-up; the latter rarely lapsed into obscenity, did not blaspheme, and cursed infrequently, while the former did all these so profusely, emphatically, variously and picturesquely that when he got thoroughly going, all within hearing-distance would listen, admiring or aghast, at the horrible though rather alluring flow of language drawn from numerous

tongues. These outbursts, searing, foul, sardonically humorous, afforded a safety-valve to his anger or his indignation, which he vented with gusto and power until they disappeared on the wings of a final audacity. Though he pretended to be so 'hard-boiled,' though he was brusque, often violent, in manner, he was warm-hearted, sensitive and highly-strung (in his successful struggle against fear, he suffered agonies). He honoured his parents and treated women courteously. He was kind, sympathetic, honest, straight-going, and, where his respect or affections entered, self-sacrificing. As a soldier, he was to show himself brave, energetic, ingenious, though a little difficult to manage at times: he did not suffer fools gladly, whatever their rank. Big-boned, broad-shouldered, he carried himself well; he was of middle height and weight: very strong, he was quick and active, though normally lazy in his movements; flashing eyes looked from strong, finely modelled features; his hair was dark, his complexion sallow; his love of the picturesque not merely permitted but probably dictated a somewhat exaggerated moustache. In conversation, while he never attitudinised or gestured and rarely gesticulated, he attracted attention (however familiar one might be with his characteristics) by the swift, supple play of feature and expression, as his eyes sparkled or darkened. He was at his most vivid when, as often, he attacked conventions and conventional opinions: heroes, for example. Withal, he was a true hero himself; none would have dared to call him such for fear of some graphic, insulting, caustic epithet, some lurid and scathingly descriptive phrase. If he became excited, his voice, always clear and vibrant, struck a loud, commanding note, which sometimes rang like metal, but, no matter how

wrathful or vituperative he was, never harsh or strident; in ordinary intercourse, it was low and rich and restrained. Despite his faults, he was one of whom it could truly be said: 'This was a man.' Frank delighted frankly (not, thank the gods, gushingly, sentimentally, nor verbally) in the talk of his friend, who, to an extraordinary degree, combined a probing yet soaring imagination, rich fancy and richer emotion with powerful, daring realism and a various and profound knowledge of men and Nature. In discussion or dispute he thrust with the rapier or felled with the club as the situation demanded. In a flash he might range from earth to heaven and, in passing, illumine the interspaces. Most of what was human was his to attack or defend, to contemplate or to divine. In an hour he might, with complete spontaneity, summarise an opera or criticise a play, describe a scabrous episode in Japan or a sophisticated *fait divers* in France, dwell enthusiastically on an idyllic retreat in California, a honeysuckled arbour in England or a corner of the veldt, release some blinding perception of ultimate mystery or some luminous exposition of unimagined associations, and denounce, with addered phrase, some military stupidity. On reading this faint likeness of one who conformed to no type, fools may scoff, sceptics will certainly doubt, yet it is Honywood's deep and lasting regret that he lacks the power to set it forth as he would wish: to do the portrait justice, one would require the analytical powers of Henry and William James combined, the force of Hardy, the delicacy of Pater, the realistic rightness of Gissing; it is occasionally difficult in the extreme to mirror life, it is sometimes impossible to convey a personality.

The disembarkation was timed for eleven o'clock,

when there would be no light save that of the stars. It was a warm night about the middle of September (1915). The transport, which had anchored for a few hours just off one of the large islands not far from Gallipoli, approached under cover of darkness. The officers had information as well as their instructions, but so completely were the men left in ignorance that they did not know whether they were to force a landing at a new point (this was freely rumoured) or to land in safety at a tested pier (as the majority would have preferred); if the latter, whether they were to go straight into the trenches, or rest for the night somewhere and then go in, or what on earth they would do. Certainly the prevalent notion was, not that they would have to force a landing but that they would have a thrilling time soon after they landed. So complete was the withholding of information that the men could hardly be described as uncertain, for they had nothing at which to grasp. They were to land, but how, when, where? They were excited, they were prepared; Honywood got a curious feeling that this excitement and this preparation were unreal, for they operated improfitably in a vacuum. Later in the War, it was discovered that the men grew restive in vacuums, disliked them intensely. On this night at Gallipoli, however, the period of suspense was comparatively short: the emotional void was filled. Apparently, at this time, the commanding officers worked on the assumption that ignorance is bliss until information can no longer be withheld, but, as Frank and Felipé agreed that night, the officers should have been impaled on a point of commonsense (this was Felipé's way of putting it): if trouble was certain or even expected, why not say so? If there was no danger, then why not reassure inexperienced troops? The

known is ordinarily less fearsome than the unknown, and to have disclosed a few essential details just before they landed could have done no possible harm. If the Turks had learnt or guessed where and when they were to land, the operation might have been rendered both difficult and dangerous (Honywood remembers wondering what would happen if, laden with equipment, he slipped off a lighter or out of a row-boat: he needn't have wondered); but there was no reason for supposing that they had learnt or did guess. Arrangements, however, were perfect. The transport had not long anchored when lighters came to transfer the battalion ashore. The waiting on board was far from tedious: the night was dark yet clear, dark if one tried to see more than a few yards, but clear enough for that short distance; the stars shone with a dispassionate clarity, causing Honywood to feel that he and his companions were muck-beetles defacing nature and momentarily to ask himself 'Why? Why?' The water lapped the ship's side; the men spoke in subdued tones as preparations (but what preparations?) were afoot, for sailors were moving about, and a line from the *Antigone* flitted across Frank's memory; occasionally—and, it seemed, astoundingly—a voice was heard from the shore; now and then the firing of a rifle broke the distant stillness; a lantern light was seen, not very far off, apparently; a rocket furrowed the sky, and as it soared and fell, a rattle of musketry punctured the calm of the mysterious land that was sensed to be nearby, and the noise seemed to emanate from a point almost directly over their heads. To be afloat with one's destiny looming ahead on unseen land is a very different matter from being on land with a move shortly to be made to some point ahead, however uncertain that point, but the men were too excited

for this situation to become oppressive. Then a lighter came to the side of the transport; the voices of the crew reassured the men and dispelled some of their uncertainty. As they were going ashore, they began to feel more secure, for the few bullets that zipped into the water were so obviously strays that they merely added a pleasant piquancy to the situation. They found themselves on a pier and then on a sandy beach, where they remained until the disembarkation was completed. Finally, a guide led them along the beach and up a stretch of gently rising land. They did not know at what distance the enemy was entrenched, but they were told that they were perfectly safe. The day had been long and full, they had not slept for at least twenty hours, and they were further fatigued by the long-drawn out excitement and uncertainty: even civilians know that excitement coloured with uncertainty fatigues with insidious thoroughness. They spread their ground-sheets, lay down with their greatcoats over them, and sank into a profound sleep.

They awoke to find themselves in a tiny valley, perhaps seventy yards long and forty across, with a ridge (on all three sides) rising about a hundred feet from the moderately-sloping floor; the ascent was fairly steep. The slopes were covered with shrubs, interspersed with a few stunted trees; not unnaturally, the valley-bottom was covered with grass. The entrance lay quite five hundred yards from the sea, whereas at Anzac Cove, the point of landing, the hills, which were almost sufficiently high and precipitous to be called mountains, rose from the beach itself, and that beach a narrow one. In this valley they were to camp for about five weeks. At dusk, or soon after, they set out to make a sunken road—a very useful piece of

work; they were back again in 'Happy Valley' (*not* the official name, now most reprehensibly forgotten) at two o'clock. This navvy's work fell pretty hardly on Frank: that he had never done such work before would not have mattered much, for the open-air life in Egypt had made him feel very fit; the real trouble was that he was neither physically nor constitutionally very strong: yet he stuck it, despite the fact that sometimes he dragged himself home only with difficulty. He stood up to it tolerably well so long as the men were allowed to do their own cooking. During the day, except for light fatigues and an occasional inspection, they rested. It was, in many ways, an agreeable life, with 'nothing to cable home about' in the way of danger. 'Johnny Turk' did not molest them at all at night; several times he sent over a few light shells, killing one man and wounding another; the former was blown some six feet in the air, as if he were flying straight up from his 'possie'; a droll sight till one realised that the man was dead,—and he was the first that Honywood had ever seen killed. Not having known him, he did not feel prompted to go to view the body. But the enemy had about as much—or little—ammunition as we had, and he reserved his bigger guns for the cruisers and monitors, that, towards evening, trained their fire on his trenches. It was a fine sight to watch the vessels moving about and letting off a broadside or single heavy, as shells dropped near them; Honywood never saw a direct hit. But he had a little excitement one morning when, with a companion, he ran the gauntlet for water: the enemy peppered this daily fatigue pretty regularly with shrapnel, though with very little success. Frank—he really was very 'green'—was ignorant of the deadly nature of shrapnel, and he considered it a rather good joke that

one of his two buckets was pierced twice on the way to the well. He had sufficient sense, however, to shelter for a while behind a bank until the shrapnel-pellets ceased to plonk about him. All the shells that fell into the valley dropped on the nearest slope and the far side, so putting the wind up the battalion doctor that he removed himself and his post to the opposite side, where he caused a very strong shelter to be made. One shell landed just by the entrance to the 'possie' occupied by Frank and Felipé; the former was away on a fatigue, the latter dozing inside. 'I was a little scared,' said he; 'but I think we'll stay right here, for it's extremely unlikely that we'll get another so close.'

This shelter of theirs, like all the others, was on one of the slopes, the valley-bottom being left free for 'the assembling of the troops,' as some officer humorously described the falling-in of the two companies camped there, the other two doing fatigues elsewhere. Some shelters consisted of a shallow hole, resembling a grave, with a ground-sheet stretched over the top or head end, others of a slight scooping-away of the hillside, with either one or two ground-sheets as a canopy supported by uprights and framework; the officers mostly slept in a couple of large dug-outs. A small thrill broke the calm of a certain Sunday afternoon when one of the garden-suburb dwellers found a large, dark-green snake in his home: there are a few reptiles in Gallipoli, but, like their kind elsewhere, they avoid too populous a district or make very rare incursions among the inhabitants. The shelter occupied by Frank and Felipé, and by them called *Our Rest—if We're Lucky*, was more commodious than that of the great majority of N.C.O.s and men; it was nine feet long, four feet high, and three feet wide at the entrance, five-and-a-half at

the back; on three sides were walls of the earth from which the shelter had been hollowed: on top were close-set branches covered with ground-sheets (discovered on the shore by the ever-ingenious Hicks, who delighted in just such a job as this), these sheets being fixed firmly at the three sides with clods and loose soil. On the levelled earthen floor they laid their own ground-sheets and Frank's blanket; when they slept, Felipé's covered them, with a greatcoat for any additional warmth required. But this very comfortable 'possie' was arrived at by an evolutionary process. The first night, they had, of course, slept where they dropped; the next day (what a queer Sunday it seemed!) they found a level space among some bushes, but a shower of rain decided them against so thorough a pursuance of the open-air life, and they moved to the middle of the colony, where in a passable, patched-up shelter, they remained for a week, until some heavy rain showed them the folly of their ways: they really got busy, with the admirable results that have been indicated. They enjoyed their handiwork, for it was comfortable for sleep or rest and airy enough to be pleasant in the heat of the day. In the small hours of the morning, they returned from road-building and slept till perhaps eight o'clock; usually they dozed for an hour or so in the early afternoon. Breakfast came at eight-thirty, dinner four hours later, and tea about six o'clock; the mornings were occupied with light fatigues or care of equipment and other odd jobs. Honywood enjoyed it all, except for an occasionally excessive feeling of fatigue and the discomfort caused by vermin. He had not known that human beings might, like fowls, be covered with lice, and he did not at first realise the significance of the disagreeable tickling and itching. He almost vomited when

he learnt the source of the trouble; it took him a long time to reduce disgust to displeasure, and two years to accept this unavoidable drawback with resigned fastidious boredom; delousing ('chatting' was the army phrase) always remained distasteful. It was always worse in cold weather, for flannel vests and woollen drawers were the happy hunting ground of these loathsome 'lodgers.'

Until the end of October, when the weather began rapidly to deteriorate, 'Happy Valley' had many good points, the days being bright and hot with a shower to freshen the earth now and again, the nights clear and cool. It is true that the flies were a nuisance; diarrhœa was frequent, typhoid and enteric disturbingly common, but one can't have everything one's own way. Some of those late September and early October days, as days pure and simple, were heavenly; some of the sunsets took one's breath away. Looking across to Mudros, the men would watch the sun as it descended on the two islands; as it sank behind them, the outline of those islands was fringed with radiant gold; then apparently it rose from under them. Across the dividing waters, the long lights stretched from shore to shore; the sun's rays, like fairy machine-guns, raked the sea with streaming loveliness. In certain conditions, golden and silver swathes stood out, with sharp beauty, from the darker waters on either side, like strips of mown and yellow grass amid the green. At one moment the crests of Mudros and her sister isle were detached from the overtopping sun: then crest and sun were differently-coloured parts of a magical mass, and as the band of encircling light narrowed and disappeared, the outline of both islands became a lustrous halo, closely imposed, restricted in width yet displaying a rapid gradation of

hues. As the aureole dimmed and the sun brushed the water, those two islands rose from a sheet of dark flame, with a sheen as of rich, burnished copper. As the dazzling whiteness that forms the core of light escaped, with a strange impression of silence, when the sun dipped below the sea, variations of purple and orange, of mauve and opalescent green and exquisitely luminous blue, flickered for a moment on the intervening waters, the islands standing dark in the apparently greater distance: those hues, losing their brilliance, yielded to pearly grey, to hazel-brown, and finally to a softened, velvety black, while a faintly lambent band flickered for an instant on the horizon. Night fell, obscuring all, and the entranced onlookers came back to earth.

Gallipoli in the summer is sub-tropical, the heat, though far from ideal, being tolerable: in the autumn it is at its best, though spring is delightful; in the winter there are frequent and heavy rains, much snow, and a low temperature. The winter, in fact, would have proved impossible. Illness and frost-bite would have caused heavy losses, while supplies from Egypt would have been uncertain; the flimsy piers and landing-stages might easily have been swept away in the formidable storms, this being a dangerous coast during December, January and February. The paths, in places little more than bridle-tracks, leading from the beach up the precipitous slopes, would have become extremely difficult and exacted constant fatigues to keep them in repair. The holders of the trenches would have been reduced to a sorry plight if the enemy had fired such mines as that which wrought havoc late in November, for the British force had only an exposed and narrow shore on which to fall back. It was Kitchener who proved once more his gift of rapid visualisation and his

ability to come to a rapid decision (which, he saw to it, was carried out) when, after a few hours in Gallipoli, he ordered the withdrawal. The Evacuation of Gallipoli was not only a necessary retreat from an improfitable, equivocal, and doubtfully-tenable position, but, in its execution, a strategic triumph. All the world knows how carefully the preparations were made, how secret they remained, how cleanly the troops were embarked. The enemy was made to grow accustomed to complete silences that lasted a whole night, and so, when the significant silence fell over the British lines, nothing unusual was suspected. The men put sandbags over their feet, and descended noiselessly to the shore; small parties stayed behind, until the last possible moment, to maintain a show of activity; time-bombs were set to cover the retreat of these parties; and, when the last men reached the shore, time-fuses were applied to the heaps of stores. It was rumoured, with what truth it is difficult to say, that only one man was left behind, and that because, having access to some rum that he knew was to be abandoned, he crept away in a drunken stupor to a lonely dug-out, fell asleep, and awoke only to find his companions gone. Probably not true, though it deserves to be.

Life, then, in Gallipoli was, until about the end of October, very pleasant. After that, the weather began to break up, and the battalion moved into the trenches. Until they did go, the two friends made the most of it. They particularly enjoyed the fortnight following disembarkation, for the men were allowed to cook for themselves, Felipé being a rare hand with meat, Frank priding himself on his skill with rice. When the company cooks took over, the rice was served out in a sticky mess and everything else suffered from 'mass-

production.' Fortunately the water was fairly good: the units encamped on the shore used the wells, which were, however, unequal to the requirements of those in the trenches; for the latter, part of the supply came from Egypt, since even the newly-sunk artesian well was inadequate. The cooking improved when the battalion moved to the trenches, but even then it was inferior and, with all allowances for the circumstances, monotonous. The army-ration goes much further if handled by the men individually (though, obviously, this is seldom practicable) than if the cooks dispose of it; this implication holds hardly less of the fighting areas than of base-camps, despite the almost complete impossibility of selling food in the trenches, for even when it is certain that there is no misappropriation of provisions, army cooks are as a rule wasteful. A marked improvement took place when they went to France, for there they immediately received company-cookers, which were economical, handy, and usable in all weathers.

After lunch, the pals smoked and yarned awhile. Most things beneath the sun—and a few beyond it—came into the arena, and their present experiences as well as their past (these latter afforded Felipé a rare chance) lent variety to an already piquant fare. Few books were available, but those few sooner or later arrived at the Hicks-and-Honywood shelter: and were duly returned. Occasionally, they had sufficient light fatigues to perform to enable them to be excused from road-building at night; these were their halcyon days. Once tea had been eaten—if cooked by themselves, eaten with leisurely enjoyment; if prepared by the cooks, despatched perfunctorily—they had the evening free. They would wander about for a while, either

strolling by the shore or talking with a battery of New Zealanders, who lay only a hundred yards from the mouth of the 'Happy Valley'; Frank was anxious to hear if they knew anything of his two uncles, Gilbert and Carlile Norris, who had enlisted about the same time as he. On returning to their 'possie' they would sit outside until it grew dark, and there, refreshed by the bland and balmy sea-breeze, they spun their yarns and wove their dreams as the smoke from their pipes drifted away. Then, having disposed themselves for the night with the pleasant knowledge that they were to sleep long and uninterruptedly, they would converse and argue or lie in appreciative silence: they had immediately become so friendly that from the outset neither felt it incumbent on him to talk. If the food had been exceptionally bad or tantalisingly scanty—or both, they shed their disgruntlement not in curses loud and long but in imaginary meals. They drew up variant menus for a convincing Barmecide banquet. 'Barmecide' naturally evoked memories of Dickens, whom they both knew well and greatly admired. On one occasion they composed a menu consisting of drinks and edibles vouched-for by the novelist, and they found those stock components, roast turkey and beef, beer and cheese, peculiarly suited to the dismissal of malnutrition to the limbo of the unpleasant reality. One night, they tried a Shakespearean dinner, which succeeded uproariously at the time, but Felipé, on waking next morning, exclaimed: 'Damn that meal with Shakespeare and the deputy-mayor at Stratford-on-Avon! It's given me a liver.' After that, they returned to the nineteenth century (a Meredithian repast bubbled and sparkled with wine and wit) or to the unaided efforts of their fertile imaginations. Nor were any of these meals, excepting

always the Shakespearean, mere debauches. Artistically they chose and arranged the table-furniture; rather as *gourmets* than as *gourmands* they savoured the courses; as connoisseurs they inhaled the bouquet of the wines, disdaining to sniff it like drunkards. 'My sherry has an exquisite flavour,' remarked Frank; 'Mine,' riposted Felipé, 'tastes like burnt potatoes; a very poor year indeed. Thomas,' he adjured the butler, 'remove this quickly and fetch me a bottle from bin No. 3.' Imaginary dialogues, not in the least resembling those of Southey, the Landors, or Traill, which neither had read at that period, were improvised over a delicious Mocha and such liqueur as would have seduced Brillat-Savarin from his gastronomic paradise to the devising of new potations. The two best, in their opinion, were those between an eminent scholar (Frank) and a rich *viveur* (Felipé), very heated this, and between an idealist and a materialist philosopher, Felipé, as of right, setting forth the claims of the latter. After the cognac or the Chartreuse, they rose reluctantly, linked arms, and strolled with masculine bonhomie to join the ladies. Inimitable in satire, parody and impersonation, Felipé would conduct conversations in which figured a countess making-believe in social work, a dowager mercilessly prosecuting her mature and worldly plans for the formation of marriages on earth, a newly-married hostess managing, rather feverishly, her first important *soirée*, and a débutante on the eve of her presentation at court. Frank's contributions were less humorous, although he reproduced with caustic realism and pregnant asides the chatter of mundane church-workers, the simpering of an affected curate, the unpremeditated reticences of a shy maiden, the woman who foolishly camouflages her emptiness with an incessant babble, the sentimental old

maid, and blue-stockings exalting Russian at the expense of English writers. General conversations, sometimes attempted, were usually successful, but they discovered that it was a difficult task to maintain the talk of accidental groups with the desultory moth-like approaches to current topics, its ineptitudes, its unappreciated or misunderstood epigrams, its numerous *faux-pas* and clumsy apologies or transparent slurrings, its cynical gossip. Felipé, who had the wider range, often amused Frank mightily with his versatile 'conversations on the telephone:' he excelled at the making of assignations, the flirtation of a young blood with a cross operator, stop-gap invitations, the fuddled attempt of a fop, after a late and heavy night, to learn from a companion, also fuddled, what he had or had not done the evening before. If one could have memorised or jotted down Felipé's brilliant conversation and his side-splitting 'turns,' one's fortune might well have been made; Honywood has never listened to a better talker, for, with all his unconscious brilliance, he never became monotonous, he never strained after effect, he always divined his companion's mood.

Women in general and particular women were discussed and analysed. The older man's experience had been comprehensive; 'the very devil—but we can't do without them' was his verdict. Though he related numerous and arrestingly varied amorous episodes (thus obtaining an intellectual and vicarious satisfaction for both of them, since, like all the others, they longed for feminine company), he never mentioned surnames. In a group he never boasted of his *bonnes fortunes* nor even spoke of them, though he might quietly deliver himself of some deliberately cynical epigram: 'A woman's all very well if kept in her right place—

bed'; 'There's only one thing worse than a woman—two women.' To make a distinction that the guardians of the so-to-be-guarded morals of the British public will fail to grasp, Felipé, though a masterful sensualist, was neither profligate nor rake; and from details pieced together, from sentimental asides, Frank guessed that his friend, never married, never engaged, treated his mistresses of a week, or, if they were both lucky, a month, with the courtesy, chivalry and tenderness that he would certainly have shown to a wife. It wouldn't be fair to tell, but if recounted, those 'New Gallipoli Nights' would make great reading—for the prudes; indeed, what a book one could write if only one were allowed! We have had a modern Rabelais (without the wit or the learning), but think what a modern Shakespeare, writing a six or seven-hundred-pages novel, would do. . . .

Late in October, Frank was so debilitated that the Medical Officers sent him to the Seventh Field Ambulance. After a three days' rest, he felt much better and asked if he might return to the company; the officer replied, 'Look, Honywood, I think you ought to be sent to Egypt and then home; you'll never stand this life.'

'But I haven't been in the trenches yet.'

'I shouldn't worry about that.'

'I'm afraid I do, sir.'

'You won't go?'

'If you ordered me to go, I suppose I'd have to; but I hope you won't order me away?'

'Very well, but you're a damned fool. However,' he added, 'I don't think any the worse of you.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Next day he rejoined his platoon, which was on the

way to the trenches. In 1917 and 1918, when his nerve had gone (though the others didn't know it), he had more than once, in particularly ghastly or dangerous or uncomfortable circumstances, bitterly regretted his quixotism; now he thanks his stars that he did carry on. He caught up his company while they were resting for an hour or two prior to ascending; everybody was reading letters from home. A pleasant sight, all those 'Diggers' (as the Australian soldiers were already called) sitting in the mellow sunlight on a grassy patch and dealing with an accumulated mail. Then they toiled up the steep, wild slopes of those gaunt hills. A few men from the outgoing battalion remained three days to initiate the newcomers into the arts of trench-warfare. The battalion quickly settled down to the new life. Normally, warfare on Gallipoli, compared with that in France and Belgium after June 1916, was a mild affair; but there were a few 'purple patches' so vigorous as to satisfy the most warlike—not that these men were numerous. Had bombs been plentiful, there would be a different story to tell, for the distance between the opposing trenches ranged from a paltry twenty-five to about ninety yards. Few were so rash as to put their heads above the parapet in daylight; a rather famous sniping sergeant of another battalion (he had a kind of roving commission) had done much good work, but success made him over-confident and one day he received a bullet through the brain. In certain of the underground galleries, no sentry knew when a Turk might suddenly appear; to be alone in such a gallery at night was a responsible and eerie business, for one had to keep vigilant watch, and long watching in the dark caused one, in the anxiety to see forms that might approach, to see forms that were not there at all. If a

Turk did appear, the victory was to the finger quick on the trigger. Honours were pretty evenly divided in these hand-to-hand encounters. Mining and counter-mining also made it inevitable that one should 'live dangerously.' To be digging a passage out towards the enemy's line and to hear him digging towards one's own may have its pleasures, but it certainly has its anxieties, for it is difficult to tell either the exact direction he is taking or the point at which he has arrived. Each party continued as if the other were not there; to do so, gave less trouble and was at least as sensible as to deflect one's path, for the other fellow might easily take it into his head to deviate sharply towards the same point. It occasionally happened that one party broke into the other's gallery at some distance from the workers, in which case the intruders were generally the quicker to realise the situation; if the intruders broke through just where the enemy was digging, the offended party usually grasped the situation the more promptly. A lively scuffle ensued. This ended sometimes in the rapid retreat of the invaders, for reinforcements might rush up in large numbers. If one heard voices, extreme care was exercised, but to gauge the distance at which one's enemy was digging was very difficult, for one didn't know what fault or rock might break the evenness of good, honest earth. Within a few days of moving into the trenches, the strongest man in No. 2 platoon—a man full of life, a confessed atheist who was violent in deed as well as in word—was killed by a bomb when mining. He had an ugly wound in the breast and his head was caved-in. This was Frank's first sight of a man slain and mutilated in war, and to see him lying there on a stretcher waiting to be removed to the cemetery at the foot of the hills, reposing stark and

ghastly on that ironically-lovely autumn afternoon, jarred him profoundly. Gazing for a moment in pity, he shuddered and passed on with a chill horror at heart. There was no time for melancholy musings or morbid reflections, but he never forgot that scene, though others far more terrible were to come his way. He flared up when some unco' guid Methodist piously remarked: 'God cut him off in his prime because of his blasphemies,' for the victim had been a loyal comrade and as brave as one could wish.

The fighting area of Gallipoli was different from that of any other front. High up on a narrow plateau stretched the opposing lines, with the beach and the sea behind the Australians and New Zealanders, and with a deep valley behind the Turks. The enemy artillery-fire came from the ridges beyond, where the Turkish reserves were placed; most of our cannon-fire was delivered by the cruisers and monitors. The enemy had the inestimable advantage of a spacious hinterland, with their supplies secured and their retreat facilitated. The front trenches were so close that the gunners had to be extremely accurate if they wished to avoid shelling their own men; in fact they attended, in the main, to the saps leading to the front trench, and to the opposing guns. But there was no really formidable concentration of cannon, and both sides had deficient supplies of shells.—One incident stands out: a half-wit (who went clean through the war) was standing at the corner of two saps near the company 'cook-house'; a shell—probably a German 77—whizzed into the sap-wall a yard away; he laughed with delight, the shell having failed to explode.—Behind the Australian front-trench, there lay a labyrinth of saps, the bigger serving for communication, the smaller for the dug-outs. That

plateau was just honeycombed and it must have presented a strange criss-cross to the airmen. The cookhouses were fifty to sixty yards from the front-trench, the latrines at about the same distance; battalion orderly room and aid-post perhaps thirty yards further back, while company orderly-rooms were within a few yards of the front. The position of the 29th Division of the B.E.F. and that of the French troops were to the left on rather different ground. One November afternoon Frank watched an attack delivered by the English troops, who, in thin waves, went at the double up the practicable slopes. The enemy shrapnel was seen bursting over their heads and one could hear the distant rattle of the machine-guns; English batteries, several cruisers and monitors concentrated on the Turkish trenches and guns, but they failed to silence the enemy cannon or to prevent the deadly machine-guns from making rapid gaps in the attacking ranks (for, at that distance, they looked like ranks); the attack wilted and withered, and only a few got back at the time, though doubtless the wounded crept in, or or were carried away, under the cover of darkness.

The Landing at Gallipoli, the few attacks, and sickness caused most of the losses; ordinary trench-warfare was not deadly. The nights sometimes became lively; the battalion's worst night was that on which they suffered fifteen casualties, all from bombs. 'Johnny Turk' must have been preparing for some days; he used bombs rather similar to the 'jam-tins' employed by the Australians. As in France, only a few men were on front-trench duty in the daytime; at night, the regular infantry held the line; and during the hour before dawn, every available man stood-to, though not necessarily in the front-trench, which would have become overcrowded. The

stand-to was imperative, for an unexpected and sustained attack might have swept all before it and have precipitated the British troops from the plateau and down those inadequate paths. Frank, like his companions, found the Turk a manly, clean and chivalrous foe; for instance, he never shelled a hospital unless a battery unsportingly used it as cover, and even then he sent warning. The usual anti-enemy stories were circulated. Perhaps the most amusing is that of a cave in 'neutral' ground: an English officer one night investigated, but was driven out by the stench of the goat that had taken up its residence there; later a Turk entered the cave, with the result that there was another hurried exit—the goat's.

Nothing like that happened in the dug-out belonging to the inseparables. They had nosed about, finally lighting on a large one, which had, of course, been constructed long before and which, previously belonging to officers, had been missed by their own, thanks to an unprepossessing entrance, dark, narrow, low; someone had probably dismissed it with: 'Dog-Kennel!' which proves the truth of that profound dictum, 'You never know what a dug-out's like by its doorway.' Once inside, they found that they could stand erect with perfect comfort. 'A home away from home,' murmured Felipé; 'Damned palatial, isn't it,' responded Frank, whose head did not reach the roof by fully fifteen inches, as he stretched to full height (six feet, in army boots). The dug-out was roughly ten feet long and nine wide; and, set in the roof, there was actually a foot-square skylight of wire-netting; the roof itself consisted of virgin earth sufficiently thick to hold together but by no means shell-proof. A ledge eighteen inches from the ground and two feet wide skirted the greater

part of the walls, from which they were made, thus offering plenty of sleeping-room for three. Admittedly, they had no brazier, the walls exuded moisture in wet weather, and rain and snow entered at the skylight but, in the circumstances, it was exceedingly comfortable. Frank and Felipé instantly realised that a third man must be asked to share the dug-out, for otherwise they had no chance of keeping such desirable quarters. They invited a likable corporal of their acquaintance. A lucky thought. He turned out to be more 'decent' than they had dared to hope, and, as he was friendly with one of the officers, he managed to keep off several envious 'one-pippers.' It was seldom that the three were there for more than a few minutes at the same time, since they all had different jobs: dinner-hour was the one sure reunion. Frank and Felipé, however, as they were frequently off duty together, were able to renew the intimacy of the 'Happy Valley' days. The corporal, now an accountant in Brisbane, did not altogether relish the free discussion of religious and moral problems, the 'daring' speculation and talk about women that often formed a large part of the others' conversation, for he was orthodox in religion and somewhat rigid in morality, yet, to be fair to him, he was neither prude nor sectarian: and he was a thoroughly good fellow. These three hit it off very well. Frank was away for three days about the middle of November, for front-line work, on poor food, had again reduced him to a deplorable state of debility. On returning to the battalion, he was made the company commander's messenger, a job that took him here, there, and everywhere. It was interesting work, for it brought him into touch with almost everything of note that happened in the battalion-sector. But towards the end of November

Frank was laid-up with a bad attack of jaundice: for two days Felipé fetched his meals, and looked after him with a quiet efficiency and pleasant understanding that brought a lump to his throat; but he became so ill that he had to drag himself to the doctor. Before Felipé went off on duty that morning, he said good-bye, for he guessed that Frank would be sent immediately to hospital. So he was; and after a day in a field-hospital (where meals were agreeable, but just about large enough to feed a canary), he left the Peninsula, for it was found that, while the jaundice was not likely to cause trouble, he was still too weak to be anything but a nuisance; on the hospital-ship he fell dangerously ill, para-typhoid having supervened. But how good the bed-sheets were to the touch! Soon after he went aboard, he had summoned the will-power to shave; this made him feel a new man, for, like the rest of the battalion (except several officers), he had not shaved since the beginning of October, for the men discovered that water couldn't be spared. He had also 'wangled' a bath within four hours: the first since Egypt. He had, of course, often 'washed' his whole body with a rag and half a mug of water; three or four times he had been able to catch rain-water in a tin from off a sloped board. Cleanliness in Gallipoli was much more difficult to maintain than in France or Belgium, while, on the plateau, certain sanitary arrangements were ludicrously uncomfortable, exposed to all weathers and sometimes alarmingly insecure. For a fortnight he lay in bed at the Luna Park Hospital, Heliopolis, where the food was pretty good. Then a cist on his neck, which had begun five weeks earlier as a tiny boil and into which the cold had penetrated, led to an affection of the ear. This necessitated a transfer to the principal hospital,

the Grand Palace Hotel, which was a magnificent building, the staircases of marble, the halls spacious, the rooms lofty, with glistening chandeliers and delicate carvings; a place calculated to aid recovery. Frank spent Christmas and New Year there; although his ear was sometimes very painful, he enjoyed his fortnight, all of which he spent in bed. The Sister upbraided him for reading so much. A few books were available, and he managed to buy three or four volumes of Nelson's *Collection Française*; especially did he enjoy de Vogüé's tragic and passionate romance, *Jean d'Agrève*, so exquisitely written.

Thence he was transferred to the large convalescent hospital at Helouan, where he remained a fortnight. If the food was excellent, the grounds were cramped and there was exceedingly little for the men to do; a barracks-like place. He was glad to move to the convalescent camp at El Ghezireh, where, after sixteen days of parades and short route-marches, he was put on to mess-orderly work, as the doctors found him still too weak for anything strenuous. The work was light and not disagreeable. After a month of this, during which he went on leave to Cairo perhaps once in four days and managed to hear two excellent symphony concerts, the whole camp was transferred to Tel-el-Kebir. At the end of March he sailed for France, some time, therefore, after the general Australian exodus thither. The removal of the troops from Egypt was effected quietly: for instance, all outgoing letters were held-up in Egypt for some five weeks.

Though small, the transport slept all the men in bunks. Apparently it had previously been a passenger boat with a very large proportion of steerage cabins, for little had been done in the way of conversion. The food was meagre and so inferior that Frank and his three cabin-mates ('a decent lot'), reviewing the situation with vigorous protest, decided to persuade a steward, for a sum not too extortionate, to procure food from the officers' mess, and to eat all their meals in the cabin. The steward was duly corrupted, and, for one pound sterling, he took the risk; he paid nothing for the food, which was worth vastly more than the price. The only rightful rations drawn by the four wise-acres consisted of a jug of tea whenever it could be had. The parades were perfunctory, there being extremely little spare room; fatigues did not exist. So, with the store of tobacco and cigarettes that they had prudently purchased, these four enjoyed the voyage from Alexandria to Marseilles. Frank read two novels that he had bought for the occasion, but he passed most of his waking hours in listening to the tall yarns and amusing reminiscences of his mates. The sea was calm, and the nights beautiful with a moon near the full; that on which they entered the harbour of Marseilles was perfect. Some ten days' quarantine had to be observed; this they performed in a camp at the foot of a low hill just outside the city. A little drill, a number of route-marches, and several bathes near the Corniche provided

their legitimate exercise. Camp was broken every night by adventurous spirits, and on the last evening the whole detachment seemed to be in Marseilles: except the guard, which had told them the shortest route to the centre of the city. Frank and several acquaintances 'did' a cinema and an excellent supper, returning to camp at one o'clock.

They entrained at eight one morning and reached Etaples at seven the following night. Those third-class carriages with their abominably hard wooden seats and backs, close-packed with men and their gear, became unbelievably uncomfortable. Whenever a meal was due, the train stopped, tea was made, and the men ate by the side, on the grass. With all the discomfort, however, a lively interest was taken in the passing scenes, wholly fresh except to a very few. Frank was requisitioned freely for the purchase of fruit and chocolates, bread and cakes, since the army-supplies were small. The food at Etaples was also deficient in both quantity and quality; Frank noticed a marked improvement when he returned to Etaples at the end of the year. Etaples was a depot; for new troops it provided a training, and the old hands learnt, or were considered to learn, something new there. The troops were kept exceedingly hard at it, Etaples staff sergeant-majors being notoriously energetic and tough. One went through courses of bayonet-fighting, in which one stuck bayonets with theatrically-simulated viciousness and force into bags of straw; bombing was taught, the Mills bomb being fresh to newcomers in France; rifle-shooting; route-marching; and a multiplicity of fancy-exercises that must have been designed to lend variety to the training, for they never attained to the slightest practical use. Leave was occasionally given into Etaples itself, a poor,

dreary, most unexciting township; Paris-Plage was once seen on a route-march, its pleasures being reserved for officers; one heard tantalising tales of its allurements, from which rankers were effectively debarred by hordes of military police. Frank was 'fed to the teeth' when, after three weeks, he most gladly left for the front. The train journey was slow and disagreeable, but that was taken for granted: this was the real thing. From the rail-head, at which they arrived at dusk on a bright day at the beginning of June, they marched, with one short halt, to their respective trenches in the Neuve-Eglise area. Two miles from the front line, they passed through a practically-deserted village; the shattered buildings aroused their interest, for this was something new and strange after the wild virginity of Gallipoli. Likewise they thrilled as they trudged along the communication-sap, yet, as at the disembarkation in Anzac Cove, nothing happened: it was an exceptionally quiet night even for that sector. The small detachment was allowed to sleep till morning, nobody desiring their presence at the stand-to. Before he was told what he had to do, Frank got his bearings in either direction along the front-trench. He was delighted with the welcome given by his platoon; the camaraderie of the army was a wonderful thing, for it endured through thick and thin, helped one to keep heart, and sweetened many an otherwise intolerable situation. There is, of course, always courage in trained masses, discipline rendering null and void any local panic, but camaraderie did more to hold the men together. He found some of his former mates promoted, some killed. The corporal-friend of Gallipoli days had become a sergeant, but he was on his way to Australia, for he had been badly 'smashed-up'; when he received his wounds, he had insisted that two

others, who had 'got it in the neck' along with him, should be attended to first. Frank soon ran Felipé to earth. He had been looking forward to seeing him, for his letters had necessarily been few. Felipé was now the corporal in charge of the company's machine-gun section; a Lewis gun, the Maxims having been made a Brigade section. 'Why the machine-gunners?'

'Damn it! wasn't I for three years a twelve-inch gunner in the American army? You wouldn't expect me to waste all that expert knowledge.'

They managed to see each other almost every day. A full account of the intervening six months was exacted and fully given by each. Felipé had actually kept several books for Frank; one was a small, thin volume, *The Ruba'iyat of Hafiz* in Cranmer-Byng's delightful translation. They both read it, and then on the long march south, it was thrown away; but the following year Frank sent for another copy, which bears the note, 'Rec'd at Bapaume, 14 July '17,' when, it would seem, he lent it to Felipé, for he did not read it till a couple of weeks later, if we may believe that information on another page which runs, '*Lu à Renescure le* 1*er août* 1917.' Some of Honywood's notes, made at the time, amuse him as, writing this, he glances again at the volume. At the side of the verses,

> 'The bitter foe was once a faithful friend.
> So to the skirts of solitude I cling,
> Lest friendship lure me to an evil end,'

he wrote: 'Compare Kipling's ". . . nor loving friends can harm" '; 'I wonder,' he suggested, 'if Tennyson, when he sang: "Had I lain a century dead," thought of Hafiz's words, "If the scent of her hair were to blow across my dust when I have been dead a hundred years, my mouldering bones would rise and come dancing out

of the tomb" '; glossing several love-stanzas, he scribbled: '*Voir la pensée d'Alphonse Karr*, "*L'amour est une flamme séparée, qui veut se réunir*" '; and he dutifully noted the obvious resemblance to Omar Khayyam in such stanzas as:

> 'A woman's smile, a lute to rouse the morn,
> A nook, a heart unbound, a flagon drawn,
> And when the red wine dances through my veins
> From Hátim I'll not beg a barley-corn.'

Or this:

> 'Around Life's keep the rodent waters roar;
> The measure of our years is brimming o'er.
> Soon, soon, O friend, the janitor of Time
> Shall cast Life's chattels through the broken door.'

Some of Felipé's 'annotations' were considerably less literary but infinitely more spirited. Take the stanza,

> 'Around her waist my hand unchided stole:
> This much I gained, and yet desired the whole.
> My arm had circled round the citadel,
> And, still unmastered, she defied control.'

Frank's written comment was, 'This stanza, in wording and spirit, closely resembles one in *Shakuntala*,' whereas Felipé's, devoid of pedantry, bore so close a resemblance to life that it cannot be printed here. Another, carried by Hicks from Egypt, was Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, the heaviness of which attested his loyalty. Frank began to read it in the trenches, took it with him for several days on the march south, and then, because he could carry it no longer, left it in an orchard; at the next halt he found it, somebody having picked it up,—and he read another chapter or so, only regretfully to leave it behind again, this time for good.

In their first talks after reunion, Frank heard that the numerous wet days of the preceding spring had

been caused by the ironical piercing of the low clouds by the church-spires: 'That explanation mightn't satisfy the meteorologists, my dear James, but it's good enough for me,' replied Felipé to his friend's laughing expostulation. Frank was sorry to have missed seeing the staging of his battalion's raid into the German trenches, although he cannot pretend that he would have liked being in it: there was nothing of the 'fire-eater,' one fears, in him. But it was an unusual raid, which resulted in ten days' leave to England for all the participants, except those who went to hospital (not one was killed). Fifty active men were trained for several weeks. 'Made up' as Australian aborigines in war-dress, and carrying nothing but bombs, clubs and tomahawks (rifles being discarded as too clumsy), they crept silently across the two hundred yards of No Man's Land. They reached their objective without the alarm being given. With a horrible yell they leapt into the trench, the bombers taking up their position at the entrances to the dug-outs, the others flinging themselves on the soldiers occupying the fire-bays. The Germans, startled, had no time to collect their wits: very few of them had seen Australian aborigines at all, certainly none had seen them in their war-dress. In three minutes the 'savages' had cleared the fire-bays. Meanwhile, bombs had been thrown into all the dugouts; so many of the occupants as survived and came to the surface were felled with club or tomahawk. No raider entered a dug-out: on such forays one doesn't look for any more trouble than is due to come one's way in any case, nor does one waste time. At either end of the short sector attacked, there stood an expert bomber, who was expected to keep the coast clear; he, obviously, was picked for courage and intelligence as well as skill, for on him depended the

giving of an alarm if overpowering reinforcements were being rushed up. Then, at a whistle from the officer, two prisoners were seized by a captor on either side and sent ahead at a very lively double. A moment later, the rest of the party threw the remaining bombs into the largest dug-outs and into the unexplored fire-bays at both ends of their sector and, with another hair-raising yell, they left the trench and snaked their way, with a quietness and rapidity ensured by arduous practice, back to their own line. If the Scottish infantry-men in their kilts were known amongst the enemy as 'the Mad Women from Hell,' one can imagine the impression caused by this raid of hideous and malig-nant devils. By one of those coincidences which do sometimes occur outside the pages of books, Honywood met, in London in 1921, a German who had been a mere hundred yards from the sector attacked. The German was rather disappointed that the other had not been one of the raiders, but he said that the rumour in their front line was that the raid had been made by a pack of Australian savages officered by a white man; this rumour, though soon investigated and rejected by their headquarters, caused a wild canard about hordes of Australian aborigines to circulate among the fighters. Such rumours—they were called 'pferfies'[1] by the Australian troops—were as rife among soldiers as among civilians. Sometimes they were circulated by spies or disaffected persons, more frequently they originated in some mistake or misunderstanding, now and again they resulted from a wag's determination to 'get a bit of fun' somehow or other. It would not be

[1]According to an ingenious wag, the name arose from the blending of the Irishism, 'murphies' = 'potatoes' with 'potatoes' itself, the Irish being, in popular tradition, notorious manufacturers of improbable stories.

exaggerating to say that the majority of the really droll, absurd 'latrine-rumours' were started by somebody (perhaps quite intelligent) who, to relieve his boredom, his *cafard*, tried his hand at this form of humour. Honywood made rather a study of 'pferfies,' and, feeling that he might claim graduate honours in this sub-section of mass-psychology, he set a few on their rounds; as they were neither insidious nor probable, he had a clear conscience: these rumours usually came full circle, and sometimes they were so distorted or exaggerated that he could hardly recognise them. He was especially proud of the rumour he spread, late in 1916, that 'the Russian Bear' was training large bodies of men in the use of a secret weapon, for three weeks later he heard that the Russians were training a brigade of bears to fight with razor-blades attached to their fore-paws. Being young, he was delighted with his experiment upon human credulity. People, especially the combatant nations, are much more credulous in war than in peace time; whether it is that they have less time to think, is uncertain, but assuredly in periods of stress the more picturesque, therefore the more unlikely, a rumour, the more easily does it gain credence; the milder the rumour, the less likely to attract general attention, or to capture the popular fancy.

In this, the Armentières and Neuve-Eglise sector, the line was fairly quiet. But 'Jerry' (alias 'Fritz'), just to prove that he was there, showed, every few nights, the virtue of his pet of the moment, the *minenwerfer*, or mine-thrower, which was his variant of our trench-mortar; this weapon was generally known as 'Minnie.' Though exceedingly unpleasant, it was not very accurate. When one thinks of the severity of later trench-warfare (that of 1917-1918), one can only con-

clude that the German batteries of 77's, 'whizz-bangs,'[1] opened fire as a due expression of resentment, a gesture of offended propriety, for the movement in the Australian trenches was occasionally too blatantly obvious to be tolerated; little damage was done. Frank, indeed, thoroughly enjoyed the pastoral, one might almost say the bucolic, calm of the summer landscape as, with intermittent intensity, he gazed through his periscope. Sometimes the daylight silence would, for hours, be broken only by snipers' shots at long intervals. Yet for all the apparent sleepiness of the scene, when a gnat's buzz was as distinct as in an English meadow, none save the very rash would dare to thrust his head over the top, for the snipers on both sides were appallingly quick and accurate. Some of the Australians from the country districts were fine marksmen, and they were gradually drafted to the company, battalion, and brigade snipers; after the end of June, 1916, the company snipers were cancelled and two were fitfully used for battalion, while the brigade and divisional sections became recognised as headquarters details. The snipers were as skilful at the deliberate shot with the aid of telescopic sight as at the 'pot-shot.' These two extremes met when a rifle was so fixed that its bullets inevitably hit a given point: immediately a man's head appeared at a dangerous corner or above an inadequate parapet, the marksman pressed the trigger; but it does not do for such a sniper to remain long in the one post, for the enemy spots or infers it before long, and puts the artillery on to it, with the result that a 'Whizz-bang,'

[1]A happy example of soldiers' slang, more aptly descriptive than 'coal-boxes' as the 5.9's (five-nines) were called. The heavier German shells had no generally-recognised nicknames. I may be wrong, but I cannot help thinking that both the German 77's and the French 75's were more effective than our 18-pounders. But our 4·7's were excellent.

seventy-five, or eighteen-pounder causes a sudden removal of the sniper to hospital or mother earth.

In the second week of July, the whole division heard, with a thrill, that they were ordered south. The unit of march was the battalion. They marched all the way to the Somme, by a moderately direct route. The first night was passed at Bailleul, of which the N.C.O.'s and men, except externallly, never saw much, for it was, to some extent, reserved for officers, more's the pity as it was a bright, compact, brisk little town. The next three nights were spent at Merville, Wavrans, and Baudricourt; at the last, a very simple, rustic hamlet, the men were allowed to rest the next day, a Sunday. The stages were not severe, and, once the day's march was done, the men were given only the unavoidable fatigues. The weather was warm, but no 'record hot days for the last —— years' were registered; just as well, as the men carried full marching order ('full pack up' was the phrase of the underlings). On leaving Baudricourt, they went on for three days, the first stop being at Authieule, the second at Warloy-Baillon; the latter was a pleasant town, the barn quarters were good, and Frank and Felipé, since an early start had been made that morning, passed a delectable afternoon in the orchard behind their barn, smoking, discussing Tolstoi (whom Felipé found a little indigestible), yarning, forecasting, dozing with their boots off; the third day's march brought them to Vaux-sur-Somme, where they remained four days. This was a semi-deserted village, not far, as the name implies, from the River Somme, in which, one scorching afternoon, the company bathed; at this point, the river was narrow, wooded, clear and cool. While they were at Vaux-sur-Somme, Frank and Felipé, who had spent their evenings together during

the previous week, passed as much time as possible in 'prospecting,' wandering about, and conversing; the men were advised to rest, exercise being just sufficient to keep them fit; they had a pay-day. The officers were busier; the adjutant seemed to have more than enough to do.

On the second day at Vaux-sur-Somme, the friends, in strolling through the streets, passed company headquarters, near which stood an officer evidently rather fuddled. Frank, who was on the inside, saluted, but Felipé, either because he had not noticed him or because it was one of his moody days, failed to do so. 'Shtop there! Corp'l Hish, how dare you pash without saluting? Do sho now.' The corporal did not deign to reply, and his brow was stormy: with a maddeningly deliberate precision combined with infinite gusto, he executed, not the normal English salute but the ornate and picturesque American cavalry salute. The officer, quite past his usual appreciation of humour, was furious: he ordered Hicks to consider himself confined to his quarters, Honywood to escort him there. There was a dangerous gleam in the corporal's eye, but, with an effort, he overcame his indignation and stalked off with the private, who looked like anything on earth save an escort. 'I don't think we need worry, Felipé, the fool is so drunk that he'll forget.' They continued their walk round the village as though nothing had happened, except that they avoided running into the officer. Saluting was always a sore point with the Australians. ('Diggers' as others called them, though they themselves used the word to address other combatants and even civilians, and among themselves they employed it in such a phrase, as, 'Hullo, Digger, what are you doing there?'). On active service they were quite good about

it, but on leave they were slack, especially in saluting any officers other than their own. They did not for a moment believe in the 'eye-wash' that the flag, not the man, was being saluted, and, even if they had believed it, they would have said, 'Why should we salute the flag? We're doing our —— bit by fighting.' In short, they considered saluting an unmitigated and indefensible nuisance, and if on leave they sometimes saluted it was done nonchalantly and simply to avoid the still greater nuisance of curtailed leave.

The incident of the cavalry salute caused Felipé to relate another. Early in May, while they were in the front line, he was sitting in the sun, making some ingenious model. A much-betabbed English staff-officer, engaged on a tour of inspection, came along. 'What are you doing there?'

'As you can see, sir, I'm constructing a model.'

'Has this model any practical use at the present time?'

'None at all.'

'Then why make it?'

'Because it amuses me,' rather curtly.

'But can't you do something else with your spare time?'

'I don't see the need or the obligation, sir. What is more, I prefer to do something like this. Perhaps you'd like me to talk shop or to join a group telling smutty stories? I should like to read but there's precious little to read up here.'

The officer, somewhat at a loss, turned silently and continued his round. From a public school and Sandhurst, one of the *haw-haw* kind most displeasing to Colonials, he was evidently unaccustomed to being addressed by a ranker as though the latter were his equal. A similar episode was to take place in April 1917,

when Felipé, accompanied by Frank, was returning from a gruelling week in the trenches. They met the battalion medical officer, who had not come within half a mile of the front line. The doctor ingratiatingly asked if all had gone well with 'the boys.' Felipé trenchantly and coldly replied, 'Yes, as well as can be expected in Hell.' The doctor flinched, grumbled something deprecatory in his moustache, and resumed his way, apparently too much taken aback to think of placing the corporal under arrest—he was a stickler for ceremonial—for his rather studied insolence. Perhaps he realised that it would be an unpopular act to arrest a soldier whose gallantry, usefulness and integrity were widely known, especially when the offender, save in a minor detail of discipline, had the right on his side. Even Frank, usually mild and easy-going, was once threatened with arrest for what the infuriated officer, having passed some unjustly derogatory remark, called his 'silent insolence'; this is an actual military offence, corresponding with the unpunishable 'silent contempt' of ordinary life.

Those four sun-drenched days at Vaux-sur-Somme were the last care-free, happy, leisured days for many a soldier in the Seventh Brigade. They left, regretfully, this little Arcady of narrow, shady streets, quaint shops, comfortable old barns (Frank had slept luxuriously in a loft piled with hay), the gentle slope from the village to the flat, grassy tilled lands encircled by the river. A day's march brought them to their bivouac, about four and a half miles from the line. There they remained for three days, doing fatigues, resting, and preparing for the attack which they were about to deliver along with two other battalions of their brigade. On the last day, their packs (technically: knapsacks) and greatcoats were

taken to Albert, where they were to be stored for such as survived. Frank foolishly put a silver wristlet-watch in his pack; he never saw it again. The men were introduced to the disposition of 'battle-order': the water-bottle retained its position on the right hip; the haversack was transferred from the left side to just below the junction of the shoulder-blades, with the dixie on top and with the ground-sheet placed in the small of the back; the 'trench-digger' was removed from the rump to the front (it saved a number of men from wounds in the belly, or turned a fatal into a merely painful wound). This was the order adopted after August 1916 whenever the troops went into the trenches; in winter, they wore the greatcoat. In an attack, they carried a bandolier[1] (slung over the right shoulder and under the left arm) of fifty cartridges additional to those in the pouches of the web-equipment, and a Mills bomb adorned each side pocket of the tunic.

At about eight o'clock on the warm, clear evening of July 28th, 1916, the battalion left the bivouac for the front line. They set off in fours, single file being adopted a little before they came to the first communication-sap; at the beginning, there were intervals of fifty yards between platoons, two hundred yards between companies, but these spaces were much reduced when the approach in single file commenced. At first they passed through a seemingly quite innocuous area, but soon they entered Sausage Gully, where, since the First Australian Division's successful attacks of a week before, cannon had been massed. Every night there was a short artillery duel, but the present attack would not be preceded or accompanied by any special activity;

[1] At Pozières on August 4th, 1916, we went over the top with two such bandoliers.

the guns were to play, not too significantly, on the front trench for a minute or so. Apparently it was thought at headquarters that the attack would come as a surprise. The men fortunately did not realise what was ahead of them: they knew that they were to attack and they assumed that there would be an adequate artillery preparation and support; this was just as well, for if they had heard that they were an experiment, they would obviously have had something to say. It was their first really serious affair and they went in with a high heart, not joyously, not sadly, not arrogantly nor slightingly, not timorously nor misgivingly. They felt that the batteries in Sausage Gully were a good augury, as they passed first the imposing, deadly-looking six-inches, then the sixty-pounders with their slim beauty of line, their exquisite poise, and finally the rearward eighteen-pounders (the forward batteries were not visible); beside the faint gleam of the barrels, and the heavy mass of the bodies of these guns, the artillery-men, stationary, appeared somehow symbolic in the deepening obscurity as the infantry passed. And as they passed, the gunners, wishing them luck, thought: 'Poor devils, going over the top; if they fail, we'll get hell; in fact, we'll get hell anyway,' and the infantrymen said to themselves: 'I hope they'll put it in hot and strong,' adding, with a grim smile, 'We'll need it all.' While one's spirit remained good, one always, whether in attack or ordinary trench-warfare, approved of the violent activities of one's artillery, but later, in trench-warfare at least, one's attitude was, 'I wish our chaps would keep quiet! They'll bring Fritz's guns down on us for sure'; the men knew that this was unreasonable, but much can be forgiven those whose nerves are so bad that even a few shells call for all their reserves of will-power.

On leaving Sausage Gully, they entered a main communication-sap, which, for some distance, was high, comfortably wide, and level underfoot. But, inevitably, it became rough and difficult, what with fallen clumps of earth, pieces of wire, the darkness. Here the sap was ridiculously low, more like a ditch than anything else; there the parapet—if the complete absence of sandbags permits the use for this reassuring word—had been widely gapped by shells; elsewhere the parados[1] was now a mere low mass of powdered soil. Except during the last half-mile, where the sap became a bitter jest, a few men from another brigade rested out of the way in small cavities on the forward side: they watched with interest the passage of these fresher troops, but they said little, for they doubtless felt that there was little to say. The going was arduous. In places the ground sank flabbily and strangely beneath one's feet, and it was only when this had happened several times that one realised that men lay hastily buried where they had been killed, perhaps smothered. The roaring of the guns became louder and much more continuous, Very and other lights appeared near-by. The last half-mile was along what served the triple purpose of a line of direction, a haphazard communication, and of a front line, alternately held and abandoned: it was little more than a low, dry and broken ditch. The trees, vague in the gloom, stood out, in the intermittent flashes of light, just like huge skeletons. Of this small wood, the leaves were withering fast, the trunks and branches torn and gashed by shells. And shells now began to fall, mostly

[1] The parapet is, of course, the mound at the front of a trench, the parados that at the back; but the terms can be used in connection with saps running approximately parallel to the front-line. *Front*, *support*, and *reserve trenches* are used of the 'lines' facing the enemy; *saps* are the 'lines' of communication, or the short offshoots from a trench.

among the trees on either side, and Honywood had an ominous feeling that this surprise attack might not be catching the enemy unawares. Just before they reached the final halting-place, his section passed a tragic group of four N.C.O.'s, of whom one was temporarily dazed by the shell that, exploding several yards away, had severely wounded two and killed the fourth. All of B Company, and all good fellows. The men left the front line to lie, waiting, some fifty yards out in No Man's Land. They did this none too soon, for shells began to pour into the wood, roaring overhead if they were five-nines, whizzing close if seventy-sevens, while sometimes one distinguished the whine of a heavy shell travelling towards the British batteries in the Gully. Behind them the shells crashed uncomfortably close, though safely distant; shrapnel pellets made a tearing sound as they ripped through the foliage, a sharp crack as they hit a branch, a duller smack against a trunk; fragments ricochetted here and there. The big shells lit momentary, noisy bonfires as they met the earth. At last, though actually they could not have waited more than ten minutes, midnight came; midnight was 'zero' time. Glad to escape from a state of suspension between the two worlds of their own familiar area and the unknown German trenches, at which they wanted to get (the attack must be made, then let it be done with! They couldn't easily go back through that curtain of fire, and all had been pretty quiet in front of them), they set off towards the German line. A few of the officers, who had been up to our front beforehand to ascertain the lie of the land, knew where that line was, but the men had only the faintest idea beyond the fact that it was more or less straight ahead of them; they were told that, on the average, it was roughly nine

hundred yards. The ground was level except for slight undulations; the shell holes were few; the British batteries opened fire when they were perhaps a hundred yards from the jumping-off line, which had been taped. While this bombardment indicated to the silently-moving attackers the approximate goal, it also warned the Germans that perhaps an attack was making. Some advance-posts, lying far out in No Man's Land, gave the alarm as the Australians swept down on them; they died gamely, those outposts in their tiny saps, and they it was who foiled the attack. On coming to one of these pits, Frank put a bullet into one who stood against the side, but even at the time he suspected that the man was already dead; looking back on that ghastly night, which seemed less real then than now, he knows that the man must have been dead, so still he stood, or, rather, half reclined, against the back of that hole in the ground which was his own height and length and little more than his width. The only man that Honywood *knows* he shot was already dead, yet it did not strike him as other than a perfectly natural thing to do at the time. He and his companions seemed to be gliding rather than doubling solidly, everything was so silent; silent because they could not hear their own steps, could hardly hear their own voices, for there was a constant deep thunder of sound: the British shells bursting ahead of them, the German shrapnel beginning to fall among them, and the German shells bursting to their rear. The night was clear, but as the fiery trails of the rockets sank down, the attackers were momentarily at a loss in the seeming darkness. So unreal; yet one saw spurts of flame ahead and tiny clouds of dust where pellets impinged on the earth; men were falling, some to rise, some to lie there for hours, some to lie there for

ever. When the Germans perceived that their outposts must have been overcome and passed, they opened fire with machine-guns, and though the Australians increased their pace over the last three hundred yards, many dropped by the way. On reaching the objective they found to their horror and fury that the barbed-wire entanglements were impassable, the bombardment having killed but few of the enemy and left his protection almost intact. They made for the openings, exposed all the while to machine-gun and rifle fire: in scattered groups and rapidly lessening numbers they rushed the trench. Nearly every man that reached so far then perished; the survivors managed to crawl away, if they were not made prisoners. Amongst those who died at the final assault was Captain Hewitt. Through one of the gaps in the barbed wire he led a party; he shot several of the enemy before he fell on the parapet, shot in the very act of waving on his men. But perhaps a quarter of the attackers had not managed to get so far. Small blame to them since the guiding officers had either been shot down or had, with the most active of the men, gone so far ahead that they were out of sight; the objective was difficult to gauge, for there seemed to be (and, in point of fact, there was) a semi-circle of flashing rifles and machine-guns almost hemming them in. Many of them had stopped in a very slightly-sunken third-class road, now covered with grass; this they proposed to defend. At a dangerous bend, swept by machine-gun fire, they built a sand-bag wall. Every few minutes, someone pitched forward with a bullet in his head or throat, the latter with a horrible gurgle, and had to be pulled off the sand-bags and set on one side so that he should not impede the movement of those who were not yet killed. On the forward side of the

road, a small party had dug a short sap, which they manned with a machine-gun; they belonged to another brigade, and, as they were not included in the Seventh Brigade's orders to retreat, they most gallantly remained there the whole of the next day; word was somehow got through to them finally that they were to escape from an untenable position. (That brigade used afterwards to reproach the Seventh with having deserted them: an understandable reproach, but hardly fair.) Among the defenders building the sand-bag wall was Frank, who had halted to see if he could do anything for a very fine up-country Queenslander named Hamilton, who lay mortally wounded. Despite the order that forbade anyone to stop, during an attack, to assist the wounded,—the stretcher-bearers would pick them up later, that is, as often as not, the following night. There was nothing to be done for the wounded man, whose brother, curiously enough, was killed by a shell in Sausage Gully ten days later. Frank found himself somewhat isolated, but he continued to advance at the double; he came to the sunken road, and there he saw several men moving along it to the left as to a rallying-point; they soon met with the party that had begun to defend what appeared to them to be an important turn in the road, a strategic position. They remained there for some time, anxious as to the fate of those who had gone ahead, for the enemy's machine-gun fire continued unabated. Then they were recalled. Many fell before they regained the deep communication-sap, for No Man's Land whistled with bullets, their own front line was being pelted with shrapnel and damaged by five-nines, and the sunken road, which fortunately led back to their own area, was swept by the pitiless machine-guns. They retired in various

directions, for either no definite order was given as to the point of assembly or, if given, it reached very few, but as they all had a sound general idea of the direction to take, there was no likelihood of their being dangerously scattered. Just as the day was breaking (it seemed hours since he had seen daylight, for even though the night had passed in a fantastic unreality, yet it was the unreality of a terrible nerve-racking nightmare), Frank found himself skirting the wood from which his battalion had emerged so thankfully; the path was rough until it joined with the main sap. Just where this sap ended, Frank, who had fallen in with two others, found a large group of the survivors gathered by the roadside. They waited about an hour for the rest; stragglers continued to arrive during the day. While waiting, they saw approaching a small fatigue party of B Company, men who had cursed because they were not to take part in the attack: those regretful curses had been comprehensible twelve hours before, the survivors would themselves have cursed likewise; how ignorant, how mad, how appallingly laughable that attitude appeared now to those who had been over the top and seen that it was not good. Among the cursers was Felipé, who, meeting Frank, gazed long at him, gripped him hard by the hand, and exclaimed, almost brokenly, with a dawning wonder in his face, 'My God, old man, you look as if you had escaped from hell!'

'Not so bad as that, Felipé; but it was a horrible business.'

Frank had gone through the night as though thrust forward, willy-nilly, by some power that impelled all his fellows equally. He had seen one friend killed, several others badly wounded, yet their very helplessness, and his, had dulled the pain of it,—and inexpli-

cably these friends had appeared to be the particular point on which his general pity could focus itself even while they elicited from him a diluted personal regard that was wondrously sweetened and mercifully deflected by his outraged humanity stirred to something deeper than a selfish grief. Perhaps one might describe his experience by saying that he stalked, all that night, through a chamber of horrors which, though they were always gibbering at the doors opening on that dark and lurid passage and did not actually step out into it, might at any moment assume reality and mutilate or slay him. That night was a grievously-conscious somnambulism and when he woke up, he at first rejoiced to be awake; that night, however, had changed his whole moral composition, though it took him a day or two to realise it. At the time, the figures of his mates, moving in the strange half-light, wreathed in smoke at one moment, clear-cut in the rocket-flares at another, were pathetically significant puppets in a huge phantasmagoria controlled from without; the hurtling fragments, the whistle of bullets, the deafening though not oppressive din that enveloped all those men and gave them uniformity of surrounding, uniformity of fate, were the natural, the inevitable setting to a witches' sabbath where all were victims. But afterwards the tragedy of that attack, which had been noted with an almost photographic unconsciousness and which had been potentially grasped during the succession of incidents, came to the surface of his mind and, in an hour of leisure, unrolled itself in its full physical and emotional detail. When he learnt that only five or six hundred men were left unkilled or unwounded out of the two thousand five hundred who had set forth from the bivouac, he grieved for the loss of the many and regretted the

absence of a few, yet at the same time he was unreasonably comforted to know that the tragedy had been actual, not foisted on his imagination by an utterly new set of circumstances.

The remnant of the battalion reached the bivouac (the sight of the familiar spot helped them tremendously to re-adjust themselves to the business of a more normal life) between nine and ten o'clock of a gloriously bright morning; half-way back they had halted, and the roll had been called; luckily the roll-call the next day was a little less heart-rending. As a messenger had been sent, post-haste, in advance, they found a generous meal, piping hot, in readiness for them, nor did they reflect that the very liberality of the helpings was the result of a preparation for at least double their number. While eating his meal, Frank looked about him and was startled to see how haggard were his companions, how dark their eyes and drawn their faces. Breakfast over, they fell asleep and were awakened only at six o'clock, when a substantial tea was served. The Colonel addressed the skeleton of a battalion—about ninety who had not participated in the attack, about one hundred and forty of those who had. No word of reproach, no sentimental phrases, blame being as rash as unjustifiable, sentimentality impossible because he was deeply moved. A week later he was himself dangerously wounded, and this had the effect of causing the men to view leniently his absence from the earlier attack.

The day following the return, equipment was examined and damaged parts replaced. Frank wrote to his father telling him something of what had happened, and although he modified the story he knew that the recipient would like to hear some genuine facts, to learn, in short, a little of what was felt and thought by

those at the front: information differing considerably from that given in newspaper paragraphs. The men rested till the evening, when they took up their share of trench and sap-digging. For the next four days, on the first of which the battalion received reinforcements, they worked every night at making a new communication-sap and at constructing a kind of reserve front-line about half a mile long, presumably for the accommodation of the adjacent troops from the real and contiguous front if 'Jerry' rendered their position intolerable. While it was advisable to finish these jobs in one night since the airmen could be assumed to spot any new activity, it was usually impossible to complete such work in a short summer night; in the second turn of these two pieces of work, they 'caught it hot.' As soon as they arrived (they congratulated themselves if they got there without casualty), they set-to with the energy of desperation; the stronger, having done their allotted portion, assisted the weaker. On the latter of the two 'second nights,' they had a narrow escape: five minutes after they had left their well-finished trench, they heard a nice little 'strafe' going on there, 'coal-boxes' as well as 'whizz-bangs' delighting the German gunners with the damage that they were presumed to be doing, just, of course, as our own gunners would have rejoiced in similar circumstances, for it is difficult for the artillery to think of trenches with occupants as other than trenches with intruders, or, more often, as targets pure and simple: if accurate, they hit those targets; if they failed to hit them, they weren't doing their job properly. The attitude of the artillery to the opposing infantry was impersonal, that of the infantry to the opposing artillery was personal, none the less personal that those wielders of destruction were

invisible and inaccessible. The infantry regarded their own artillery with affection, the artillery their own infantry with pity.

During this week of comparative calm, Frank and Felipé saw as much of each other as they possibly could. They 'dossed' together, their ground-sheets erected as an awning. As the rifleman returned from fatigue in the early morning, he would find the other asleep, but however quietly he lay down he heard the enquiry 'All O.K.?' The weather, except for one drizzly day and several passing showers, remained brilliant, and to drop asleep at the dawn, in air as sweet and clear as that over an English field, was a sensuous joy to those exhausted by the night's digging. They had many a long talk and once they 'spread themselves' at a canteen, about a mile further back, on expensive macaroons, preserved pears and Ideal Milk in place of cream. Felipé waxed violent on the subject of infantry 'stunts.' Discussing the affair of July 28th-29th, he burst out: 'Another such massacre would justify a mutiny.'

'*Massacre* is a bit strong, isn't it?' rejoined Frank. '*Criminally culpable negligence* is about as far as one can go.' And then he boiled over in turn: 'To think of all those men sent to attack a trench with the wire-entanglements almost intact—and a great number of the defenders perfectly intact as well.'

They both asserted bitterly that while the officers who took part in the attack deserved all honour for their conspicuous bravery, the persons responsible for this damnably managed 'surprise' should have been cashiered.[1] The brigade as a whole was never again so

[1] I have no wish to fix the guilt in this matter: not being on the staff, not being an officer at all, I don't know exactly how the attack came to be proposed and approved; probably the sound advisers were over-ruled. But Honywood's feelings were shared by all the rankers and many of the officers.

used, but in the latter half of the terrible 1916-1917 winter the greater part of a battalion was sent across the mud and slush of No Man's Land to capture F——, a village not far from Pozières. On this occasion also, the officer ordering the attack remained in his dug-out: an incompetent bungler, he thirsted for glory. Half the men were bogged, some were drowned in the shell-holes on this pitch-black night; those who were not drowned perished either from the bitter cold or from the fan-like fire of the machine-guns. Those who reached the enemy had to use their bayonets as daggers and their rifles as clubs, so choked with mud had they become. They despatched a few of the enemy, but the majority were slain or captured. Perhaps one in five regained the trench from which he had climbed with the aid of a ladder and with despair at his heart. The responsible officer was merely removed to a base job, mainly because the Higher Command wished to show their displeasure thus, and partly because his life would not have been safe if he remained with his battalion; the men who survived this wintry fiasco had been overheard to say, 'God save us from our officers!' One does not care to reflect on what was suffered and thought by the men who, knowing that they could not hope to escape from the foul quagmire in which they were held fast, froze slowly to death in No Man's Land that night. What could stretcher-bearers do? They would likewise have been bogged. They did attempt the impossible but had to desist. The moans of the unfortunate victims made their mates in the trench squirm in their helplessness, and one of them cried loudly in his agony: 'Ah, Christ! to die like a bloody dog!' He was not far off, and his friends, who had known him as quiet, mild, clean-living, almost old-maidish in his dislike of strong language,

had an inkling of what he was enduring as he struggled to disengage himself from the mud: he had been hit in the belly by a sharp fragment of shell. But if the disgrace of F—— caused much local gnashing of teeth, the affair of July 28th-29th, 1916, originated that cynical remark which one so frequently heard made of absentees at informal roll-calls: 'Hanging on the barbed-wire.'

Frank and Felipé also talked one day about the rôle played by chance, for it struck them, as of course it has struck everyone who took part in a fierce attack, that it really was extraordinary that one did live so long in a hail of bullets and pellets and fragments, where, one would have thought, nobody could survive for more than a few seconds. But their talks were to end. On the night of August 4th, the whole division, along with some English battalions, was to attack a sector of some extent, the left flank of Honywood's battalion being indicated by a windmill; its jumping-off place was a trench slightly in front of the now destroyed Pozières, which had itself been captured about a fortnight earlier by the First Australian Division. These two big attacks were known among the A.I.F. as the Two Battles of Pozières.

That day, the men were rested as much as possible. A rapid yet business-like inspection of all gear, distribution of additional cartridges and of Mills bombs, a warning (quite unnecessary) about water, bully-beef and biscuits, and general instructions occupied the hour preceding the late and generous dinner. The leadership of the companies, platoons and sections differed greatly from that which had obtained in the attack delivered exactly a week before. For instance, a new reinforcement officer that, in the earlier affair, had led No. 2 Platoon

with distinction and arresting gallantry, was now to command B Company; the senior corporal of the platoon was now its lieutenant. Frank had been persuaded, much against his will, to become a lance-corporal in charge of his section, of which he was the oldest soldier, but, as he did not wear the stripe into action, he reverted silently to the much-preferred honour of being a private; when he returned to the company some months later, Sergeant Lawson, an old hand in his own platoon, accosting him with the words, 'You're a lance-corporal, aren't you? We want a corporal,' was won over, with friendly adjuration and dire threats, to say nothing about that wretched stripe. Nor did his officers' frequent invitations to go to a 'school' from which he would emerge with a star change his mind; nor did the urgings of relatives, who tactfully spoke of the legendary field-marshal's baton in the private's knapsack (or was it a haversack), soften him. It was not so much that he doubted his ability (though he certainly did not suffer from 'a swollen head') as that he refused to take a job that might result, despite his best efforts, in the destruction of his companions, for he rated human life more highly than war. Quite wrong perhaps, but there it was.

Just before the battalion assembled at a quarter to three, the pals shook hands. 'The best of luck, old man!' Brief final instructions were given, and at three o'clock on a hot and brilliant afternoon the men set off. They had only six miles to go, but these miles were circuitous. Time was allotted for a halt half-way and for a long rest before 'the hop over,' as the climbing out of the trenches into No Man's Land to make an attack was always called. Moreover, in military operations, a wide margin must be allowed for changes of plan, for unforeseen delays, and for the possibiltiy of a straying

from the appointed route. As it happened, those six hours were none too much. Since the battalion was among those moved up just in time for the attack (for the front line of a dangerous sector—this one was particularly 'hot'—cannot be packed with men for long, since they may be heavily shelled at any time), the approach was difficult. Platoons were separated by considerable intervals: a hostile aeroplane might spot the movement and put a battery on to it. Sausage Gully, which, so named because of its shape, looked very different in the daylight, was crowded with guns, some well camouflaged, others fully exposed. The batteries were even more numerous than they had been on the night of the 28th July. Several additional eighteen-pounder batteries were to go close up at the last moment, others were to replace them in their former positions; some sixty-pounders were aligning as the battalion passed, and shortly after they left the bivouac they had seen four six-inch naval guns settling into a new emplacement; behind the bivouac a battery of large-calibre howitzers had come to reinforce the bombardment. Everything indicated a tremendous artillery preparation and full-hearted support, but as the enemy must have noticed the unusual activity, he too was going to make it exceedingly warm for the infantry. Yet B Company was less than half a mile from the front line when it first came under fire; they knew they were about to 'get it fair in the neck,' as an old soldier cheerfully told those near him, for they had seen an airman flying low and immediately overhead. Several men were wounded and sent to the rear; by the irony of fortune, they were reinforcements going into action for the first time. 'Lucky devils'! (*devils* was not the word used) muttered the survivors of July 29th. The last two

hundred yards of the sap were unpleasant, for here it became shallow, being in several places completely exposed. As they reached an iron-hard road, across which ran no sap at all, they began to be plagued by 'whizz-bangs'; luckily, there was, just past and to the right of this road, a deep shelter-sap about fifty yards long, probably built at the suggestion of a pioneer-battalion commander. Nobody dared to cross the open space for a quarter of an hour, so heavily was it 'strafed.' Having suffered very few casualties, they put the short remainder of the approach behind them in record time, for it was at the mercy of an enfilade fire. They walked some distance along the front trench to the right, where they expected the jumping-off point to be, but after a short rest, they received an urgent message to move to the left. As they hurried with difficulty along the encumbered trench, they cursed vigorously: 'Why had they been sent into an already well-occupied sector? Any fool could see . . . ,' with the other obvious remarks, which were, in this instance, fully justified. As they returned to the head of the big communication-sap, trouble descended on them, shells falling all round, a few five-nines adding their weighty aggravation to the already lively annoyance caused by the seventy-sevens. To reach the newly-dug jumping-off trench, which left the front line at an angle of thirty degrees, they had to go a hundred yards: and in that short distance, many dropped to the ground, killed or badly wounded, thus adding to the ticklishness of the narrow, damaged trench. A shell had struck the very junction at which they were to turn off, had wounded one man and half-buried another, on to whose neck a mass of earth had been dislodged. It had struck him so forcibly and in such a way that one side of his body was wholly

visible; his neck was nauseatingly elongated. The body displayed no wound, but a wound would have lessened the ghastliness of that face with its protruding tongue and starting eye-balls, the grotesqueness of the shoulders' surprising distance from the sagging chin. After a fascinated, stricken glance, Frank hurried on, as he was bound to do lest he cause a stoppage in the hellish trench that he was quitting. Once they had passed that now perilous corner, they felt, and were, fairly safe. 'Jerry' did not shell the jumping-off trench at all while the battalion stood waiting, although he almost certainly shelled it later.

The men waited quietly: there was little comfort to be derived from friendship, for most of one's friends had gone, the majority now being newcomers. Our guns were silent, except for an occasional eighteen-pounder barking at the German front line. The dusk was gathering, a warm dusk that might have been so beautiful and was actually tingling with the suppressed hopes and fears and uncertainties of the thousands waiting for the unleashing of the storm. The men hardly dared look at one another; the old hands were fighting grimly against misgiving, the new hands were struggling against the oppression of an ordeal of which they knew nothing except by hearsay but which they felt was momentous. All knew that the first objective, the German front trench, was half a mile distant and that they ought to reach it, at a steady double, in six minutes. Major Currie moved about, reassuring his men with a cheery smile and quiet words of encouragement; he stopped for a couple of minutes, talking with Frank. 'Hold yourselves ready,' he ordered; the warning rapidly passed along the trench. On the tick of 9.15, which was 'zero' time, a tremendous roar of guns made

the world a great sounding-box, and as they saw the preceding line of flame from the shells falling like an avalanche on the German front trench, the men clambered out. Sixty-pounders and naval guns were searching the enemy batteries and heavy howitzers were dropping on the enemy's second line. For four minutes a stream of shells poured into the first objective, thus guiding the attackers, who could, however, see tolerably well; the barrage, lifting, was transferred to the second line, with a curtain fire of eighteen-pounders both before and behind it. Certain batteries, specially set aside for the task, continued to probe the known German batteries, but the foe, who had probably anticipated a sustained offensive, had brought up many additional guns presumably at the last minute, for he maintained a deadly shrapnelling of No Man's Land, the British front line and communication-saps, kept shelling the forward batteries with five-nines, and tormented Sausage Gully with even heavier guns. Meanwhile the Australians swept on beneath a rain of pellets, a level sleet of rifle and machine-gun bullets, a storm of whirring nose-bands and hurtling fragments, ever desperately towards that objective which they passionately desired to attain. 'Oh, to get there!' was the general thought. When their own barrage was raised, they still saw clearly the goal, now indicated rather than outlined by the spits of flame from the few remaining rifles and machine-guns: the German survivors fought gallantly but were soon overcome by superior numbers. The attackers cleared the trench and, at scheduled time, they advanced to the second line, where they met with a stouter resistance. They might have captured some seventy-sevens had they gone another two hundred yards, but the officers judged

that a further advance was inadvisable; besides, they had no clear instructions on this point.

After clearing, cleaning, and repairing the second line against the attack that they expected at dawn, the men obtained half an hour's valuable rest before the German guns opened a heralding fire on the trench and the field greys were seen advancing, even at this date, in a much closer formation than the British approved for themselves. Only half the onset reached the Australians, who repulsed them in a grim hand-to-hand mellay. An hour later, a second attack, somewhat lacking in spirit though formidable in numbers: this too was repelled. Two days that trench was held, for all the severe pounding to which the enemy subjected it. Greatly reduced in numbers and weary to death, they were at last relieved.

Felipé, fighting like one possessed and using the vilest language (luckily for the Germans, very few of them understood it), inspired his machine-gun section to fresh endeavours; in the end, he worked the gun alone, the others having been killed or sent to the rear wounded. He told Frank afterwards that the strain of constant activity and the lack of sleep were almost worse than the shelling. Frank, on 'hopping over,' kept close to the major, who, about two hundred yards out, noticed that the troops were getting into groups and therefore shouted and waved instructions for them to spread out. Frank, immediately obeying the order and strangely rejoicing in the opportunity to do something particular, something sensible in this mad welter of noise, had doubled several yards to the right when he was struck as by a sledge on the left side of his back, a blow that, had it come twenty seconds earlier, would have caught him in lungs or heart. He dropped as

though pressed down by a great and sudden weight. At first he was dazed, but he soon came to alertly and found, with quiet satisfaction, that the wound, though bleeding somewhat, did not appear to be dangerous. Amid the wreaths of smoke, illumined to a momentary lurid distinctnesss by the flashes of bursting shells or lime-lit as a number of rockets simultaneously curved through the evening sky, his companions moved like sorcerers, intent on some foul rite; their insistent onwardness, however, lent dignity to their weird appearance. Soon they disappeared, waving their rifles and yelling. As they receded from his view, he felt a vast loneliness overpower him for a moment, but he shook this off, for he perceived that it was foolish to lie exposed to those malignant shrapnel-pellets, one of which had felled him so crushingly, or to present so ready a target for the flying pieces of jagged steel. He could have stood, but cautiously he crawled to a shell-hole. His head ached; he felt feverish and thirsty. On reaching for his water-bottle, he discovered that his right hip was wet, with blood as he learnt when he saw the viscid scarlet on his hand. 'Strange! I didn't feel that before,' he said aloud. The blow on the side had been so severe that he had not felt this simultaneous lesser impact: 'Nothing serious, evidently,' he muttered quite pleased. But he must have that drink. He lifted the bottle, unexpectedly light, from its straps. A second pellet had gone through about half-way down, thence into the fleshy part of his hip. He sipped the water with appreciative slowness and carefully replaced the bottle. The water must be conserved, for though he realised that a shell might finish him at any moment, he wished to have something to drink in case he should escape, as he felt almost confidently that he would. His wits

were at high tension; he observed how the shells were falling, and, since heavy shells were dropping close with alarming frequency, he moved painfully, yet rapidly, to a large shell-hole some fifty yards nearer the German line. There he was safe from bullets, reasonably safe from shells as he guessed on noticing that there was no other hole within a radius of twenty yards; he snuggled hard into a forward angle of the cavity. He lay hunched-up for a long while, solitary in a raging world. The solitude so told on his nerves that when a wounded man came by and suggested an attempt to regain their own line, he agreed. But they had gone only a few yards when the other was struck down beyond all rising; he desisted and returned to his shelter. He listened awhile, hoping that the firing would give over, saw that it continued, and dozed fitfully, waking with a start as a five-nine, dropping close, punctured the regular, uniform din to which his ears had become accustomed and somewhat dulled. The darkness thinned at the approach of dawn, which came with a strange unexpectedness, the night having seemed so long that he had lost faith in its ending. He perceived that the German battering of the original front trench had ceased. Bent nearly double, for the wound in his back had become sore and the flesh had stiffened around the two holes (the pellet had entered perpendicularly, furrowed along an inch beneath the surface, and, where the flesh curved inwards, issued gently), and moving with a slight limp, for his hip wound had been closed by the fresh night air, he walked slowly to the trench, guided by the trees through which he had come some ten hours before. He was hopefully preparing to go back in search of an advance dressing-station, but just as he reached the head of a main communication-sap,

Fritz began to shell the adjacent part of the old front trench with five-nines. He sheltered in a small dug-out that already contained four wounded men. Every fourth shell landed from twenty to thirty yards away; and of these, five dropped so close that their shelter swayed and threatened to fall in on top of them. To exasperated nerves and exacerbated tempers (for wounded men always consider that shells preventing them from getting the necessary medical aid are indications of unnecessary cruelty on the part of their enemies and sheer malignity on the part of fate), the explosions, the clods of earth thumping down at the entrance of the dug-out, and the jagged fragments of metal singing overhead or whirring to within a foot of where they stood, were a most damnable aggravation of their plight. At last, the battery ceased to torment them, and Frank lost no time in setting off through the torn trees, among the now even more ruinous ruins of Pozières, and along the further sap. As he left Pozières behind him, he gazed back on that tragic village, where not a wall remained standing higher than two feet; it looked like a town flattened by a tornado with the additional desolation that the wreckage was charred and crumbled to the mere semblance of wood and brick and mortar. Through the wood, the village and for a short distance beyond, he had sometimes to step aside to avoid a corpse, while he saw others placed hastily to one side of that sap, which was now little more than a dry runnel-bed; he shuddered to come on a private from his own battalion lying prone in the sap where, in his probably hurried progress, he had been precipitated to the ground with half his head shot away; other sights were so disgustingly horrible that he had to say to himself: 'This was once a man, not a beast of

the field.' Mangled, mutilated corpses stretched in the sun; hands grasping the rifle in which they had trusted with a foolish, pathetic credulity; arms raised protectingly to the head to ward off the blow that had got the man in the heart; one poor devil, cut to shreds by the explosion of the Mills bomb that had been struck in his pocket by a shrapnel pellet; two legs lying puttee'd a yard from the trunk and gashed head, the man having been hit in the middle by a shell; a gaping wound in the back of the head, the victim's hands clawing the earth as they stiffened in the momentary death-agony: these sights, and others that would have sickened the keeper of a charnel house.

Finally he reached a dressing-station, was trolleyed to a field-ambulance two miles back on a high, tree-covered, Arcadian knoll, conveyed in a motor-ambulance to Warloy-Baillon of pleasant memory, and sent, after inoculation against tetanus, to Rouen, where he remained for a week before being despatched to England.

## IV: FARNHAM, ETAPLES, BULLECOURT

The journey from Le Havre to Southampton was thoroughly agreeable, despite a certain amount of anxiety about submarines. The English countryside soothed Frank to gentleness, banishing the bitter thoughts that had made him restless as he lay at Rouen. At Aldershot, while they waited to be conveyed to the Cambridge Military Hospital, he watched one of those human little incidents which sweeten war. A group of girl war-workers, seeing the train come in, waved and called greetings; one, a bonny lass, was attracted by a rather handsome Australian, to whom she threw a note asking him to send his name and ward so that she might visit him; soon after he reached hospital, the man wrote a note, which soon brought the girl. Frank, after four days, had seen all he wanted of this hot-bed of rules and regulations. One morning, just before the medical inspection began, the sister straightened his bed, which he disturbed by moving to ease the pain of the wounds in his back. Along hurried the sister in advance of the doctor; seeing the state of the bed-clothes, she scolded him crudely. 'Apparently, sister,' remarked he, 'you think less of your patients than you do of the beds.' He was transferred to a charming Voluntary Aid Detachment hospital rather more than a mile from Farnham. A county family had given their fine country-house to the cause that its owner already served. It stood in large grounds of lawn and lake, meadow and woodland. Frank, who stayed there five

weeks and could have stayed longer, read and took his ease; he wandered about the grounds; one sunny September afternoon, he visited such delightful places as Godalming, the Devil's Punch Bowl, the Hog's Back, in company with Sergeant-Major Clarence Moore. A few days before he left, he watched the cricket match between English and Colonials, in which Moore bowled with much 'devil.' One evening he went to the cinema in Farnham, another saw him at the concert given by the staff, who, through the good offices of her brother, were assisted by Miss Carrie Tubb; her rendering of several of the *London Lyrics* was exquisitely spirited. But it was the English landscape that most powerfully and enduringly captivated him: eagerly he surrendered to its tranquil beauty, its fascinating variety, its storied mellowness and its eternal youth: sensuously, joyously, delicately he delighted in a rustic bridge over a small stream threading with silver the sunlit glades of green-leaved bush and secular tree or running, dark green, beneath heavy masses of pendent foliage; the ruins of an ancient abbey that, vested with precious memories, was fenced off from fat and sleepy kine browsing in a sleepy meadow; hills covered with golden furze or browning bracken and shaded by autumn-tinted trees; copses of nut-bearing hazel, carpeted with lush grass or fringed with filigree-fern; a silent lake that, girt with trees and covered with water-lilies, lay sombrely radiant in the sun or glimmering with a glamorous sheen in the moonlight; dank, wild rockeries; long, straight waters of a quiet stream and long, level, parrot-green lawns.

He was sorry to leave this scene of generous ministration, of camaraderie enchantingly sincere. After a day

at the leave-depot, Perham Downs, very depressing after that V.A.D. hospital where British womanhood served with modest ardour and reticent sacrifice, he went on a fortnight's leave, which he filled with a visit to an old friend at Edgbaston, a run through Warwickshire, and, at the beginning and end, a round of theatres and social life in London; the play that he best remembers was *Romance*, superbly acted and well suited to please an emotional period.

Some tedious weeks on Salisbury Plain. Then, not too sadly, he returned to France: perhaps those camps on Salisbury Plain were purposely made repugnant in order to insinuate into the minds of the men the thought that, while France could at times be hell, it did offer brighter moments and happier days than fell to their lot in those dreary, monotonous camps. At Etaples, where he arrived late in November, Frank remained much longer than he had expected. Soon after landing, one of his tentful most thoughtfully contracted measles and sent the others to the isolation camp for three or four weeks; the men naturally were kept together. They were a pleasant lot, quite the most attractive chance-grouping that Frank ever met with: Jim Lang, a young, well-educated pastoralist from the Queensland plains; Grant, a gentle, charming, silently energetic and manly Scot, who had spent some years in Australia,—he and Lang were captured in 1917 at Lagnicourt and put on farm-work in Germany; several other distinctly good fellows; no 'duds,' no cads, no objectionables. Honywood and Lang soon discovered that their parents were distant neighbours, that they had acquaintances in common, and that they both read a good deal. They quickly became friends and hit on the idea of sending to England for some books. They easily persuaded the

group to club together. Each of the ten selected a book from lists that Frank had in his pockets, but no volume was ordered unless at least three men approved of the choice. Lang sent for Cheiro's smaller book on palmistry and initiated Frank into the mysteries: they derived much fun and no little profit from reading all the hands, because everyone exposed his defects and confessed his hobbies with disarming readiness. Frank ordered Fisher's *Napoleon* and Grant the *History of Scotland* in the Home University Library series, which furnished another man, rather surprisingly, with *A History of Nonconformity*, actually read by six of them! But the most popular book of all was *Joseph Andrews*, providentially seen in the Everyman lists. The money was sent in French notes and an unregistered envelope to Hatchards, with whom Frank had got in touch while in hospital at Farnham: the books came back very promptly, and though the postage exceeded the amount expected, the booksellers excused them from remitting the balance. The men did physical exercises and went on route-marches along almost deserted roads, but, all in all, they had much free time; they enjoyed the marches, however, for they passed through that unexpectedly attractive area which lay beyond the shed-like hospitals and the dreary parade-grounds. When they returned to the main camp, they were kept together until the line summoned them. Frank stayed behind, for he failed to pass the medical examination: he had the satisfaction of knowing that he must have been pretty unfit, for men were badly needed up at the front. He was made an orderly taking out messages all over Etaples; at night he went on foot, in the daytime he cycled. The first time he used the bicycle, he nearly came to an unwarlike end, for, going down the slope

by the railway bridge near Etaples station, he discovered—nobody had warned him: one of those humorous instances of military nonchalance—that the brake didn't work; he retarded the motion as much as possible (which was very little) and managed to slew the bicycle round at the corner and up the incline leading to the bridge itself. The whole incident lasted, at the most, thirty seconds, but during that time an amazing number of thoughts passed through his mind. Afterwards, he was rather pleased to have had the experience, for it proved, or at least helped to prove, that his scepticism about reviewing one's life in a moment of crisis was unjustified: for once, the popular novelists were right. After a month of this, he became an orderly-room clerk. His luck 'broke even' when the sergeant-major caught measles, for, being the only other person sleeping in the building, Frank went to the isolation-camp with him, had no drill at all, good food, and plenty to read, but, out of isolation, he found that his job was gone, had to return to a tent and drill, and soon left for the front (the doctor, though slightly hesitant, having pronounced him fit). Once a 'cushy job' was interrupted in the army, it was 'napoo': there were always men eager to secure the vacated place; that sergeant-major lost his, for while he was away the other headquarters N.C.O.'s plotted against him, used his illicit visits to the orderly-room to his disadvantage, and finally got him 'deposed,'—although, had they liked him, nothing would have been done. It is unpleasant to have to say so, but this sort of dirty work did sometimes go on among soldiers; it was, however, rare. The sergeant-major raged and fumed in vain; Frank took it all in silence, for, though he hated and feared the return to the front, he had the decency not to

wish, if he were again fit, to keep a less fit man out of a comfortable job.

In late March 1917 he rejoined his company, the march from the rail-head (Albert, where, on the outskirts, he passed a night in the dreariest, most forbidding camp he ever had the misfortune to shiver in) having been made by way of Flers of bloody memory. Strange to say, the detachment did not leave Albert till the afternoon. It was reported that an attack was preparing for the next morning, but no orders had come through. On arriving at a village when it was already dark, the newcomers heard first of all that they would rejoin the battalion for the attack, then that they would not, then that they would ('Yes, it's certain this time'), and finally, to their undisguised relief, that they would not go up until the next day. Such pieces of luck were rare. At ten o'clock in the morning they received instructions to proceed to battalion rear-headquarters, where they ate their iron-rations and obtained some tea, before carrying supplies to the front-line; a nasty job. The attack had been successful; the casualties, fairly heavy, had been sustained mainly after they captured the trench, for a heavy mist had facilitated the approach. One of those killed was Captain Cherry, the battalion's first V.C. The battalion came out the same night, for they had succeeded beyond expectations.

In this, the Bullecourt sector, Frank was in and out of the trenches for seven weeks. On one occasion they were engaged in front-area fatigues for a couple of days, when they carried supplies (food and ammunition) to those in the combatant trench and dug a cable from just to the right of Noreuil to the front line. They would reluctantly leave their 'possies' in that sunken road which runs straight out from Noreuil to the left; at

dusk, of course, for both their sleeping-place and Noreuil were close enough to the enemy to render caution extremely necessary; the Bullecourt sector was 'hot stuff,' whether the activities were such fatigues, ordinary trench routine, or raids and attacks. The cabling party—a large one—picked up the spades and cable on the outskirts of Noreuil, where a party of engineers awaited them with the material. Now, digging a trench for a cable by the shortest route to the front line means risking an enfilade fire. On the first evening at this task, the party, on the way there, was held up in Noreuil by heavy shelling. On the second they lost five good men while they were digging the trench: probably an airman had spotted the suspicious brownish line across an otherwise pretty-uniformly green field, although the fatigue party had attempted to cover their tracks by replacing the green sods on top; such replacement was difficult on a pitch-black night, and the temporary interruption of the water-supply to the grass caused many of those sods to wither slightly; in the daylight such withering, though scarcely noticeable from close at hand, was conspicuous at a distance, especially from above. Much more agreeable was it, during the day and from their lairs in the sunken road, to watch the heavy British shells bursting in Bullecourt and sending up clouds of smoke and dust, the latter showing brick-red if viewed through field-glasses. The German airmen, who during most of 1917 had the upper hand owing to the superiority of their new fighting 'planes, were active, and as a result of one man's report, the sunken road was briskly peppered with 'whizz-bangs,' but as all the 'possies' were, of course, on the near side of the road, no harm was done, though it thrilled the onlookers to see shell after shell

bursting against the opposite bank, which was fully eighteen feet away. But sometimes the airmen became over-confident. One day the men resting in a sunken road close to Noreuil were startled to see a 'plane approaching very low; they scattered like rabbits into their burrows, which the airman, flying insolently forty feet above them, raked with his machine-gun as he reconnoitred the whole of the occupied length of the road. As he turned, not to repeat the dose, one imagines, but to photograph this bee-hive, he came round very sharply. While he began this manœuvre, two Australians darted out with a machine-gun that they had feverishly prepared as they lay in the sunken road, from which they could not get at him properly, plumped down at the top and trained their gun. The airman spotted them just as they simultaneously emerged over the bank and settled into position; he fired several rounds and missed; the Lewis gunners, making no mistake, brought down his machine, helped him to extricate himself, and walked him to their company headquarters. As they were going there, the airman, in excellent English, remarked: 'That was once too often, wasn't it?'

'Well, you shouldn't have had such a bloody nerve!' Whereat, all three grinned like old friends.

The front-trench, of which they saw a good deal during those seven weeks in the lovely late-spring (which seemed to be trying to recompense them for the perfectly damnable winter), was very much livelier than the support and reserve lines and was itself a sunken road of varying depth, having for some distance a bank only four feet high, and elsewhere ceasing for twenty yards—the latter exposed to an almost constant machine-gun fire. Things might become brisk

at almost any hour of the twenty-four, but the hour preceding, and that following, the dawn were unfailingly made hideous with a bombardment. The Germans had constructed several exceedingly strong lines for a considerable distance on either side of Bullecourt, but that did not prevent them from expecting British attacks, nor, though apparently Hindenburg was concentrating on defence, did the British discount the possibility of an attack on their own lines; as a matter of fact, 'Jerry' did, just about this time, break through in this area and manage to reach the advanced batteries. The stand-to was often very 'trying' indeed, for it isn't altogether pleasant to line a bank with 'whizz-bangs' whistling all round and an occasional one razing the 'parapet,' with mine-throwers actively operating from posts in No Man's Land (it was one of Felipé's little duties to take his machine-gun section into an advanced post to keep an eye on the mine-throwers and to warn the men behind him in the event of an attack or raid), and with 'coal-boxes' droning ominously. One had time to shelter from the five-nines, the last part of whose passage resembled a deep roar; if that roar was heard for a perceptible space of time, all was well; if one was in the track, the shell came with a tremendous rush, a swift descent that put into one's heart and mind the fear of God and the devil, and all manner of sickening thoughts compressed in a blinding flash of time; the earth appeared to meet one in a deafening blaze, darkness enveloped all; then others came and sorted out the dead from the wounded and the dazed, the latter being exceedingly lucky if they had not received very serious shell-shock. No; whizz-bangs were preferable: they came with such rapidity that one had no time to reflect on the result; the result was thrust on

one's notice, or set one beyond notice, with commendable promptness; the after-effects were less grave, for the concussion of a 'whizz-bang' burst was a little gentleman compared with that of a 'coal-box's.' The concussion of shells with a calibre not less than nine inches was such as to cause instant death if one were unprotected within fifteen yards, but deaths from concussion pure and simple were few.

Felipé had been badly shaken by concussion at Lagnicourt; Frank heard that he had been sent away. But the day after they reached the hutments, he found him sitting there very gloomily. They were delighted to meet again, though Felipé forthrightly explained that he wished all the same that he had 'got a Blighty.'[1] Except for one short leave, he had been constantly in the thick of it since September 1915. More seasoned and more bitter in general, he was more volcanic in his now less frequent outbursts. In the front trench, they shared a 'possie.' Having made a deep pit, where the two could sleep comfortably feet to feet against the side of the road at its most sunken, and having enjoyed two days' immunity for their periods of rest, they returned one morning after a prolonged and painfully enlivening stand-to only to find that the bottom was covered with four or five feet of fallen earth. Though tired, Frank set-to and rescued a book that he usually carried on his person but had inadvertently left lying on his folded ground-sheet; he certainly would not have bothered about the ground-sheet alone. In hutments, they resumed the old ways, sharing their blankets and food.

[1] The phrase, 'a Blighty one,' originated in the British Army in India ('Blighty' deriving from the Hindustani for 'England'), but it soon reached the Colonials; 'a Blighty' was a wound (not a malady) that would cause one to be sent to hospital in England, or to hospital elsewhere with England to follow.

These hutments were collections of wooden shed-like huts, usually designed to house a battalion; smaller groups were set apart for brigade or divisional headquarters. As a feature of the countryside in the front area, these hutments arose in the 1916-17 winter; partly, indeed, because of it. They had at first been a characteristic of base-camps in the back area, but they were promoted to provide adequate shelter where the villages and towns were few or where they afforded inadequate shelter or none at all; such villages obviously increased in number as, the war continuing, they came under the notice of the enemy's ever-increasing artillery activities. These huts were cool in summer, cold in winter, and every piece of wood that could possibly be removed from the hut without letting in the rain or causing the structure to fall about their ears, was utilised by the men to supply the braziers in any area short of wood. Many stern orders were issued against such behaviour, but without effect; while the men had the sense, as they always had, not to damage a hut seriously, they were doing about all that humanity could expect of them: they suffered enough, God knows, in the trenches; why should they suffer intensely from the cold while they were back for a so-called 'rest'? Sometimes new officers spoke with great moral indignation of such 'lawlessness'; the others, knowing what the men had to put up with, did their best for them, but if they failed to improve their lot, they shut their eyes gallantly to this 'wanton destruction of property.' On one occasion when the battalion was supposed to remain in hutments for a fortnight, and all sorts of arrangements had been made, they went on the second morning to shoot on a 'range' about two miles away. There was something really humorous

in the idea of such a procedure among troops not far from the front, but, as they saw later, it was not a mere pass-the-time. Frank got the shock of his life when at two hundred yards (the targets were not very large) he registered a 'possible.' He had noticed a certain improvement in his shooting when on Salisbury Plain and at the miniature-range at Etaples, but he simply wouldn't believe Sergeant Lawson when he came up to offer his congratulations, and the good man had to walk him over to the target to convince him with the pretty piece of marksmanship that greeted his incredulous eyes. As a result of this, he was selected, with one other, to represent B Company in the school of sniping instituted at Brigade Headquarters. The thirty-two chosen from the brigade went every morning and afternoon for instruction by the officer in charge of Brigade Snipers and by its very alert corporal, 'Bluey' Bellbooth of the flaming hair, who now paints Brisbane red—and other colours—as an ingenious and enterprising sign-writer. The targets were extremely small; the distances one hundred and two hundred yards. Ordinary and snap-shooting were practised, theoretical instruction was given, but telescopic sights were not used. Although Frank never topped the score, he usually got within the first ten. But this delightful interlude came to an abrupt end, for after a few days the brigade was suddenly recalled up the line, as another Australian Division had overshot the mark in an attack near Bullecourt, and many of its men had been hopelessly surrounded and captured. They passed the night a little beyond Favreuil, where they slept fitfully owing to the inclement weather. After several fierce days, during which they worked like madmen and were bombarded almost incessantly, they returned to hutments. Three

days' rest; another night passed near Favreuil (where one saw some very pretty firing at our observation balloons and where our anti-aircraft guns vainly tried to bring down the hostile 'planes—Frank never did see one thus brought down); three more hectic days up the line. When they came out, having suffered heavy losses, the battalion heard that a long rest was ahead for the whole division: nobody believed the rumour. Nor were their doubts lessened when a detachment of twenty was sent for a fortnight in the latter half of May to St. Valéry-sur-Somme. Felipé was put in charge of the detachment, Frank was of it. Not a coincidence, obviously. The adjutant knew of their friendship—apparently the whole battalion did; he also knew Frank slightly, and so, perceiving that Felipé needed a rest very urgently, and that Frank would cause no envy in the breast of the strong man of the battalion, he packed them off with a seemingly casual word. From near Mametz, the party walked to the station across an area that had been fought over by English and Australian troops the previous year. The ground was broken but not damned, for the grass grew, though irregularly and in patches, yet cheerfully and fairly vigorously, and among rusty rifles and fragments of shells poppy and cornflower thrust their civilised blooms; they passed a huge shell standing upright and intact—how it came there was something of a mystery. They reached St. Valéry-sur-Somme in the dusk, and when they arrived at the camp two miles away they had to pitch tents, for it had been 'opened' only that morning. After tea and stew, they fell into a profound slumber. The fortnight was utterly delightful, for it rained only twice and the weather exerted itself to do its best; St. Valéry's best in May takes a lot of beating.

The soldiers were English, Scottish and Australians, who fraternised most happily. In the morning they had 'physical jerks' and either a brief parade or a short route-march; for the rest of the day they were free. Open camp was proclaimed, and leave held automatically within a radius of five miles. Only the guard felt disgruntled, and well it might, for all it guarded was the orderly-room. Felipé's detachment twice mounted guard, or once more than was quite fair. During the first week, the inseparables visited the small but pleasant old fishing town three or four times, sampled the pastries and sipped the wines. The Scotsmen in their kilts rather scandalised the women, who raised shocked hands—and peeped through their fingers; the commanding officer humorously admonished them on parade, and urged them to avoid offence. A young English officer less humorously asked all the men not to make love to the women; his attempt to stem the inevitable was received with ironic silence. In the second week, Frank and Felipé, with several others from their party, bathed most mornings after parade, the Somme being just warm enough to make swimming enjoyable. On several afternoons they walked to neighbouring hamlets, where the others rarely if ever went, their allurements being too modest and quiet. Having strolled about, they would seek refreshment at some decent-looking, unpretentious cottage and do themselves well with either coffee or cider accompanied with rolls and butter, while once, having walked far, they obtained some delicious fried eggs—the finest meal that either had eaten since he left England. They always met with success, 'due of course,' remarked Felipé, 'to our charm, our suave good manners,' as he swept off his hat with the air of a Spanish grandee. If the after-

noon was particularly hot and they felt lazy, they would enter the coppice flanking the camp, and there lie at ease and talk as the spirit moved them, or maybe they would read. The sun fell like drops of crystal rain through the leaves and danced about them, the scented air and the drowsy hum of insects brought dreams of quiet and rest, the peacefulness and the complete absence of danger induced an opiate sense of security, the birds chirruping amid the young trees added a note of gaiety, and the cerulean of the sky, hung infinitely beyond the immediate roofing of sun-flecked leaves, hinted at an all-transcending rightness and significance that forgave, while it pitied, the carnage of men impelled by a mad, senseless inability to cry *peccavi*. To their worn bodies, jangled nerves and bruised hearts, those golden hours with their tranquil felicity and wonderful companionship brought a balm and a healing. That fortnight was the last time the pals were to be long together, for, the day after they returned to the battalion, Frank received from the adjutant an offer of two jobs, one of which he was bound to accept unless he wished to be sent to England, for his debility had become very marked. Orderly-room clerkship to his company, or a transfer to the Brigade Observers. The former was hardly soldiering, though it meant that he remained with his friend. They talked the matter over; Felipé said: 'You'd prefer to join the Observers, wouldn't you? I'm with you there; although . . .' which 'although' was his reticent admission that the decision hurt him just as he saw that it hurt Frank. For all their weariness, they had helped each other to do the decent thing. Weary in body and soul were these two, like the rest of those who had seen a good deal of fighting and suffered much hardship.

The spirit of the older hands had changed. On Gallipoli, they did not get enough fighting to make them fear war or even to dislike it, for they were fresh, the warfare did not rack their nerves but merely emaciated their bodies; guarding the Suez Canal proved rather like a monotonous game; the trench-warfare of the Armentières sector in May, June and the beginning of July 1916 had its tragic moments, its bad quarters of an hour, but the strain was by no means constant, the stand-to bombardments comparatively light, the day-time almost idyllically quiet for hours on end; the Somme battles had forced fear into them through the sheer weight and intensity of the strife, its ghastly charnel-scenes, its shattering noise, the almost inevitable impression that a man had not a dog's chance of weathering that storm of shells, that rain of pellets, that driving sleet of machine-gun and rifle bullets; the 1916-17 winter made the men thoroughly miserable with its biting cold and relentless rain, for they were for days on end subjected to discomforts that cause the ordinary civilian to run for a brandy or a doctor if he experiences them for ten minutes, discomforts that, added to the often formidable bombardments, drove the iron right into men's souls; the Bullecourt phase rendered the old hands pessimistic, for they lost many of their own number, and saw the reinforcements being swallowed up, in particularly severe trench-warfare and costly successes in raids and attacks, against a foe whose aircraft so clearly held the upper hand, whose artillery seemed every month to increase in both quantity and quality, and whose Hindenburg Line revealed a strength and ingenuity that they had never seen, and never were to see, equalled in their own trenches. It is true that the long rest enjoyed by the Second Division

in the summer of 1917 benefited them immensely, allowing the men to recuperate physically and to renew their moral fibre. The men cast off the bad days as they would have dismissed a nightmare, and thereupon proceeded to forget the horrors. Human nature's elasticity, its power of recovery are never more helpful than in wartime: it was those two qualities which kept the men sane. Yet there always remains a residue of damaged nerves, impaired courage, destroyed enthusiasm: the driving force has gone. For instance, the shelling of Brigade Headquarters in August 1917, when the men had been out of the line more than two months, brought back the old haunted look and the restless hands.

When Frank joined the Observers, he needed the change and the rest. He had gone into the Somme fiasco of July 28th-29th, 1916, as bravely as any man: he had, a week later, gone into the battle of Pozières a thorough coward, although he would not for worlds have shown it nor even confessed it. The Bullecourt area, where he escaped very narrowly twice or thrice, had increased his fear and horror, and he confessed it to Felipé, who reassured him by saying: 'I'm every bit as much of a coward as you are, old man. Every time I go to the trenches now, I have to conquer my loathing, my dread of the whole damned thing.' During the Bullecourt phase, though never before and never after, Frank's nerves were so bad, his fears had so possessed him, that he often thought of deserting and planned how he would get away; but, as he bitterly admitted to himself, he had not even the courage to desert; an insistent sense of shame, which he resented, may have helped him more than he knew and it certainly kept him from confessing this to Felipé, though the latter would just as surely have understood. He was heartily sick of

his cowardice and suffered the anguish of hell because he could not blindfold himself to its throughness; he did his very best, all the while feeling what a fraud he was and blushing with mortification when he realised what his officers (some of them friends) would say if they knew him for the craven that he was. He often contemplated suicide at this period, but there again he had to recognise that he simply did not possess the courage. Then, while he crouched beneath a bombardment, he cursed himself for not having deserted, for not having taken his own life. His nerves, raw and sensitive, would be raked as though by a metal comb when he heard a shell approaching, and when it burst his whole body shook, he wanted to shriek aloud, throw down his rifle, and run madly out of the trench: yet, by an effort of will that would leave him temporarily weak and relaxed, he kept his lips shut, he stood or crouched as still as he could (for that others should notice his fear would have been worse than the fear itself). If during the deplorable slackening of control that followed the need for control, there came another shell-burst, the shock almost made him vomit, his body seemed to him to be crumpling, and he grit his teeth in agony lest he should give way. Once, indeed, when he had been enduring this for two nights (they were, admittedly, rather 'hot'), he looked so ill that the sergeant-major, on his own responsibility, sent him away to the battalion aid-post. He was pretty sick with himself for having to go and very nearly got into trouble for arguing with the sergeant-major; 'It looks damned rotten going out like this. I haven't even a scratch.' 'Look here, Honywood, you're a good fellow but a bloody fool. Buzz off, or I'll get annoyed.' Yet all the time, except at the crises, he felt that if only he could keep going he was doing

the right thing, for although war was in itself evil, ghastly, at times indescribably terrible, and although it should be avoided at almost any cost, and peace should be striven for by everyone without exception, yet, once a nation was involved and was defending, not a shadow such as national honour (for what was national honour beside a nation's suffering and torment), but her very existence, her womenfolk and children, she must carry on; efforts to secure peace should be constantly afoot while the fighting continued; if fight one must, it was difficult to justify any decision other than that to fight bravely and intelligently. It was all very well to pay for others to fight, but if one was oneself able to fight one should do so; it was damnable to scoff at those who were defending one's life, one's relations and friends, and one's property; it was ignoble to profit to the full by their potential sacrifice of life while one did nothing oneself.[1]

[1]These are not the writer's present views foisted on the Honywood of 1917, but are drawn from a note-book that he carried at the time. For an extraordinarily telling case against 'fighting by proxy,' I may perhaps be permitted to refer to a long quotation in my *Robert Eyres Landor* (London, 1927), at p. 78.

## V: IN THE BRIGADE OBSERVERS

On May 31st, 1917, Honywood was transferred to the Observers' Section at Brigade Headquarters just when the division began its long spell out of the line. The section was commanded by an officer, a nice little fellow of whom one saw very little and who made so slight an impression on Frank that he cannot recall his name. The real control lay in the hands of Corporal Cosky, dapper, smiling, capable and brave; he never asked his men, of whom he was most thoughtful, to do a thing that he himself could not, or had not the courage to do, with the result that they never gave him the least trouble. He had been a tailor in England before he emigrated to Australia. There was no section lance-corporal, though Collins wore a stripe; Collins had been a dentist in Tasmania. Falconer and his bosom friend Barry afforded a contrast to each other: the former was a tall, hefty Queenslander, the latter a short, slight Irishman; the former was bluff and hearty, the latter quiet: both, however, were amusing, excellent companions, and skilful observers; both too were unusually good shots. Klauer, the son of a South Australian senator, had been with the Divisional Observers and in 1918 he returned to his battalion, for he failed to do justice to the corporalship of the Brigade Observers that, during Cosky's three months' absence due to a wound, he secured by methods displeasing to his mates and that he had to relinquish when Cosky came back: to his credit it must be said that he himself

asked to be re-transferred to his battalion and that he died like a man some months later. Dick X. (name forgotten) was a West Australian farmer, earnest, ingenious with his hands; but he transferred to Brigade Transport, for he was an excellent farrier. Percy Z. (name likewise forgotten) was a good observer and a 'very queer fish'—he knew more about criminals than was altogether commendable; but he had an excellent heart and a ready affability that contrasted strangely with his reticence. And Bob Thayne, a farmer, who became Frank's crony among these men: a first-class observer, a dry humorist and a wit, as straight as a die yet very tolerant; an agnostic who read much.

During the long spell out of the line, in the prime of the year, Brigade Headquarters moved twice. Each billet was pleasant in itself and in a pleasant district. Since Frank's old battalion lay never more than three miles away, he and Felipé managed to meet a couple of times a week. It was usually Frank who made the journey, for he had the more leisure. The first of the Brigade Observers' billets was a hut built in the grounds of a farmhouse attached to a small château (serving as officers' quarters and orderly-room) in the village of Senlis, where they remained till the end of a wonderful June. There Frank was initiated into such parts of the art of observing as map-reading, map-drawing, the use of a telescope, and the essentials to be reported. He proved an apt pupil, for he had as much experience of attacks and trench-warfare as most and he had always watched critically the activities, methods and subterfuges of the military machine; the spade-work he knew already, and that spade-work of hard experience as an ordinary infantryman ('foot-slogger', *pousse-cailloux*) cannot be replaced by mere theory. The finer as well as

the applied aspects he studied so closely, when the brigade returned to the line in September, that by the end of February his corporal declared him to be one of the three best observers in the section; he has never felt so proud as he did that day. In the long evenings he would go to see Felipé or stroll about Senlis or read; one week he watched the brigade boxing tournament, a very stirring affair in which the heavy-weights showed no reluctance to floor their man.

The observers' second billet, occupied throughout the first four weeks of July, was a tent pitched high on the big knoll that dominates the old ramparts flanking one side of the attractive town of Bapaume. In this, the healthiest and most delightsome of all three stages in their summer's rest, their tent was one of a row lining a short natural terrace overlooking the ancient moat with its sixty-foot walls. Gazing at its sides, overrun with low trees and thick bushes, delicate ferns and luxuriant grass, one hardly thought of mediæval battle; no stream, no stagnant pool recalled its history. Most of the buildings in Bapaume were damaged externally and gutted of all valuables. When they had arrived it was to find the town-hall a smoking ruin, with many digging at it; there were few victims, although a number of persons, including two French notables, had slept in it the night before. The enemy had left a time-bomb there when they had abandoned the town. Frank, as though fascinated by the traces of human habitation and recent domesticity, attempted to reconstruct the lives and characters and professions of those who formerly inhabited these houses, whether fallen or partly standing, in and out of which he strolled and lingered. The dwelling that interested him most was that which had evidently belonged to a solicitor.

The ground-floor rooms offered nothing much, but, clambering over a heap of ruins, he entered what was once a study, to judge by the account books and the text-books in law and in general literature; the roof was almost completely gone, but in one corner Frank found a few books that were in quite good condition; these contrasting melancholically with the dusty, weather-beaten heap on the floor. Many standard authors and five or six contemporaries were there. Ancient Classics and modern languages; in English were a complete Shakespeare (illustrated), a *Quentin Durward*, a Byron, and a Fenimore Cooper; in German, a *Faust*. To Frank it seemed that the most curious volume was a history of philosophy written in Latin by a German scholar, and as it was 'a nice clean copy,' almost 'in mint condition' in fact, but with an extremely poor chance of remaining so, he picked it up, amused himself for an evening with it, and posted it to some English acquaintances, for he thought that if by any strange chance he 'got through,' he would like to have it for a souvenir; apparently those acquaintances thought likewise, for it has never been returned. But when the sight of so many blasted hopes depressed him, he went to the outskirts of the town and walked among the gardens of larger houses, scarcely one of which was still habitable. The houses in the centre of the town he reserved for free afternoons, the gardens he visited in the evenings. In those long, narrow fruit and vegetable gardens he discovered a few plums that others had missed, he scorned to hasten past a bed of strawberries or a bush of red currants; he would then sit beneath a tree in the fresh, sweet air at sunset and gaze at the ruins at his back, more lingeringly over the fronting meadows that encircled Bapaume with green undulation, uncropped

meadows that resembled a sea of grass, waving gently in the hardly-perceptible breeze and diversified with a riot of wild flowers springing joyously in a freedom and luxuriance and beauty that they had not known for centuries. The glory of that French summer of 1917 is an enduring memory: its pervasive warmth, its beneficial clarity, its clemency, its suggestion of an invisible race holding ruined town and abandoned field against the return of the people which had made so much of the much given by Nature. Doubtless all these separate features and the more important yet indescribable general atmosphere of the areas in which he passed those three delectable months were accentuated for him by his vivid, sometimes anguished consciousness of the background of noise and suffering and horror; up there in the line, as with a poignant mockery of the loveliness of summer, men were slaying one another, and with the horrible insouciance of inevitable tragedy they were dying, perhaps in agony, amid the scent of grass and flower. In winter, war-death is grim in mud-choked trenches gashing a cheerless sweep of monotonous grey and forbidding black, in spring it oppresses one with a sense of foul injustice to youth and lusty prime, in autumn it intensifies the melancholy of falling leaves and browning landscapes, but in summer, as De Quincey, in a memorable passage, said of sudden death of any kind, it is more terrible, more tragic then than at any other season. Many days, of course, Frank had no time to visit scenes inducing such thoughts. The troops were kept fit with fatigues, parades, sham battles (a very gruelling fight was that around Riencourt-lez-Bapaume), and route-marches, one of which took them through Biefvillers, Achiet-le-Grand, and Grévillers, and another, with little rest and full pack up for fifteen

miles, was particularly severe. On this latter, about four miles out, a section of bag-pipes (which provide the most inspiriting of all march-music) was commandeered and made to cheer them on. The pipers went back to the billets with them, were given a hearty meal and plied so generously with drink that they were considerately returned in limbers to their battalion. Then, too, the staff-captain was tormented by an unholy itch for surprise kit-inspections, will-makings, and other red-tapery. 'He has an idea,' remarked Bob Thayne, 'that we must be kept on the *qui vive*, that we mustn't enjoy ourselves too much, that, in short, we should be harassed like Tommies.'

From Bapaume, which was close to the front, the brigade moved to Renescure, which, perhaps six miles from St. Omer, lay about thirty miles back. There it remained from the beginning of August till the middle of September, with the excellent weather improved by the staff-captain's extended leave. They had no long route-marches, but several manœuvres, a brigade-inspection by Earl Haig, who watched them, some days later, in a divisional march-past. Games were encouraged, cricket being the favourite. On many a blazing afternoon, Frank and others from the section bathed in a wide, swift-flowing canal. A good canteen compensated the men for the dullness of the village. But one night, Brigade Headquarters, of which the officers occupied a small château surrounded by a picturesque moat and the men a large barn and kindred places across the moat, were awakened by a loud explosion, which the majority believed to be that of a large bomb about half a mile away. Four minutes later a deafening crash and a tremendous vibration startled them nearly out of their lives, and in the resonant

silence they heard clods of earth falling. The second explosion, a hundred yards off, apprised them, by the absence of aeroplanes, that a bombardment by one of 'Jerry's' long-distance guns had commenced. The next two shells fell considerably farther off, yet in the same line. With that expert knowledge which in war often brings agony, they feared what might happen if the gun were not deflected a point. They fervently hoped that the point-deflection would be made; they held themselves taut as they counted the now-ascertained interval of four minutes. Their hearts missed a beat, horrible thoughts flashed through their minds, they felt a sickening, cold emptiness grip them desperately at the midbelly: from the sky issued an eerie moan that rapidly became an increasingly tremendous yet curiously muffled roar, much as though some giant veiled the deathful message of his threats by shouting them with lips almost closed: the transition from moan to roar and from roar to immense detonation was so rapid as to be perceptible only to trained ears, the untrained hearing it all as a daunting blur of accumulated noise. The detonation, though formidable, had a hint of suffocation: the shell had, in fact, fallen into the moat, blown a pump right out of the water, and caused the brick château, standing twenty yards from the point of incidence, to totter and rock alarmingly. The barn, though forty yards from the impact, shivered and swayed. Then stones and clods hurtled through the air, falling in the yard or on the roof; nobody was hurt. The language that followed was almost as dangerous and startling as the shell: 'Hell!' cried an agnostic; 'My God!' muttered an atheist: what some of the others said could not even be hinted. All the men felt that that would be the closest burst, and so it was. Of the seventeen shells that

fell that night, none hit Renescure, one landed close to an outlying cottage, breaking its windows and displacing many of its tiles, but injuring nobody, and not a soldier was killed. Yet the cavities made by those shells (their calibre, one heard, was about 13.5 inches) averaged fourteen feet in depth and eighteen in diameter.

Early in September, Frank went on leave, which, commencing with a walk in the dusk and a drive in a farmer's cart to St. Omer and progressing through the stages of London, Birmingham, Torquay and London, landed him on September 20th at a camp occupied by skeleton battalions. That very day, a fierce battle had been fought, beyond Ypres, by the Seventh Brigade. Frank was jolly glad not to be there; he much preferred being with 'the skeleton.' This was the first occasion on which his division adopted the thenceforth general practice of leaving in reserve, from each battalion at each engagement, a few officers and men representing every branch of activity. A really bright idea. In the Australian forces, such a battalion-nucleus always contained a sprinkling of 'Anzacs,' but as early as September 1917 these men who had seen active service on Gallipoli and who wore a metal *A* in the middle of their regimental colours constituted a very marked minority.

Frank, by way of Poperinghe ('Pop' to all soldiers), rejoined his section at Reninghelst, where they remained a couple of days in hutments. There they were bombed one night with the diabolical little 'grass-cutters.' Two bombs fell right among the huts and tents, the first doing no harm, the second wounding six men who had foolishly risen to their feet on hearing the earlier burst. Brigade moved up; they passed a night near Dickebusch and heard many bombs dropping not

far away. At Ypres the section billeted in the great barracks, which, despite much damage, still afforded tolerable shelter. Although things were always quiet in Ypres when he marched through or stayed for a few hours, Frank had the constant impression that some day 'Fritz' would destroy it utterly. The next day they set off along the Menin Road, along which they hurried just as fast as it was dignified for at-the-moment-unshelled infantrymen to do, for this particular stretch, especially when the road was muddy, stank in the nostrils of all good soldiers. They turned to the left, walked on duckboards over an expanse of the most dismal and shell-torn country, and arrived in the dusk at a very large, rectangular block-house that had been made by the Germans. The observers without overhead cover operated from a step made against the rearward wall, over which they peered; several nights, for some special reason, they carried on from a sandbag wall in the front of this concrete structure. After a week, half the section went out one evening, the other half the next evening, for a proper night's rest, several miles back, in the immense Canadian Dug-out, which, constructed like a catacomb, slept perhaps two hundred men and could, at a pinch, hold two thousand; the bunks were incredibly hard and uncomfortable; the whole place dripped with moisture and gave off a peculiarly pungent earthy smell. From the two entrances, set in the inner side of an unusually deep trench, steps descended fully thirty feet. Many tiny and a few large rooms were set on either side of the two long parallel corridors intersected by numerous short passages. From the dully glistening walls, the unfamiliar echoes, the appearance of withdrawal from all things natural, one derived an impression of weirdness, of a tenuous hold on life, and

one felt little and incomplete: life, deprived of its pulse, had become timeless. It was almost with relief that the observers returned to the block-house, where they remained for a few days. A week out at Vlamertynghe was followed by a fortnight's observing from a small round 'pill-box' directly facing Passchendaele Ridge; their new post stood about half a mile to the right of the large *blockhaus*. Out they went for another week, in again for ten days, which they passed once more at the large 'pill-box.' They preferred the large, because in the much smaller one, the sole room was occupied wholly by the officers; the men slept outside in frail little shelters. In this area, 'Jerry' frequently used gas, launched mostly in those shells which, bursting with an innocuous and ludicrously muffled *pop*, emit a deadly, sickly-sweet vapour. The release of gas from cylinders had been almost abandoned by October 1917: the method was wasteful, a breeze of the right velocity and direction had to be awaited, and if the wind veered one was molested by one's own gas. The use of gas by the enemy would be announced by the raucous, penetrating Klaxon. Observing with one's gas-mask fixed as the shells popped around the pill-box may have been picturesque, it certainly was difficult, and while one was at the smaller place, one did not welcome the idea of even a gas-shell entering the wide opening in the front-ward side of the post, which consisted of a kind of attic-room covered with cement and giving on the mound of earth that partially camouflaged the structure proper.

During this occupation of the Ypres front, the weather was persistently abominable. Even in summer the land looked as if it were hideously pock-marked; for six months of the year the ground was sodden, and

all the innumerable shell-holes filled with water. To walk along the slippery duck-boards on a pitch-black night, with sleet driving in one's face or snow-flakes obscuring the view with a dazzling irregularity, and with the pools alongside, sometimes beneath, deep enough to drown the heavy-laden, exacted a constant strained attention and unflagging care; the Very lights and bursting shells rendered progress even more difficult, for after the sudden brightness that illuminated the undulating mud and the green, scum-covered pools in the vicinity one seemed momentarily to be moving in an immensity of impenetrable darkness; it was better to continue, however slowly, by feeling the way with one's feet, for if one stood still, the man behind might jolt one off the narrow path, and to fall into even a shallow hole was highly disagreeable, the water being foul with rotten equipment, with excrement, with refuse, all perhaps churned up by a shell or covered with a vapour of sour gas, which lies about for hours on the lower levels and in damp weather. Many a strong-stomached man has vomited on being extricated from such a pool.

At the beginning of December, the observers rested for six days at Steenwerck, a favourite billet. As always during the previous spells behind the line, Frank went to see Felipé, whose service was still unbroken except by furlough. At this period, Felipé, who had the best-service record for his company, was the first to be sent on leave to Paris. About the 9th of December, the section went 'on post' for a whole month (except for the day when they had 'leave' for the purpose of getting a bath) facing Warneton in the Messines sector of the Armentières front. Frank learnt a good deal from this area, for it offered variety and interest, duly and

humorously expatiated on by Bob Thayne, who was sometimes on post with him.

It was their duty to observe the sector with unremitting attention, to examine closely the enemy front-trench with an occasional sharp glance at the saps leading thereto, systematically to tabulate the artillery fire—its periods, the calibres used, the areas shelled, and if possible the stimuli to sudden outbursts, the causes of sustained artillery-demonstrations. At night they attempted to ascertain the full significance of the various hostile lights, but just as they were on the point of unravelling the multi-coloured skein, the code would change; for certain combinations, certain single colours they found a pragmatic significance, which stood all pragmatic tests: one sees now that some of those solutions were probably wrong, for one obviously interpreted the lights not by the instructions thereby signalled but by the accompaniment or immediate result. Thanks to the excellent Zeiss telescope that had been captured at Lagnicourt in March 1917—for it was vastly superior to the ordinary British field-glasses—the observers succeeded pretty well in all except reading star-shells and rockets. They observed for their own infantry brigade and reported direct to headquarters. From December 1917 onwards, they always, when it was practicable, had a telephone which connected the post with the brigade's advance orderly-room. Sometimes they billeted in, or at the side of, the post; at other times any distance from a quarter to three-quarters of a mile further back, the latter arrangement causing no deterioration in service, but rather, since then they usually had better meals and sounder sleep, an improvement. If they observed from a 'pill-box' or a permanent observation-post (the latter—

falling to their lot only once—had necessarily to be very strong and completely camouflaged), they naturally slept right at hand. Often the post was simple and incapable of warding off anything more dangerous than a bullet, sometimes not even that: a mere cubby-hole at the head of a short sap running off from a communication-sap, such a sap ensuring a certain amount of security by the avoidance of any considerable movement near the post; no one but an observer went along the offshoot, and no observer would be fool enough to disclose his whereabouts. Every post had an aperture just sufficiently large to allow the telescope free play; almost every post held two persons; and the majority contained a rough seat. From April 1918 onwards, the section observed either from a modest shelter or from the bank of a sunken road or again from a hole excavated in the ground. This last, necessarily made at night or in a fog and, in order to command an entensive view, lying on an eminence, would be about six feet long, seven deep, and three wide, with one step to climb out by and a second for the observer to stand on, while at one end would be a ledge on which the non-active observer would sit, attend to the telephone at his side, or, if there were nothing urgent to do in the daytime, read a book or write a letter until his turn came to 'keep an eye on Jerry'; in making such a post, the displaced earth was so scattered as to elude the searching gaze of a hostile 'plane, a small disguised parapet was constructed, and a gap made for the telescope under a live bush if possible—if not, under a dead bush or branch, or even bracken laid over the top of the pit for most of its length. If they were observing from a 'pill-box' or an established post, perhaps only one man would be on

duty, though two were always sent if it were practicable: the watch would last two hours. If the post were at some distance from the billet, the men worked always in couples, even if there were a considerable risk of their being detected in the act of changing-over; obviously, they then changed with only one man moving at a time; if the likelihood of detection were small, they stayed three hours on post, but if considerable, four.

During the month in which they faced Warneton, the Germans made things pretty hot at times and twice entertained the observers with a five-nine bombardment as they were on their way to the post; these pleasures were not, of course, in their particular honour, but were extended to the communication-sap in general, for a large fatigue-party carrying wire had been spotted. Once they were forced to leave their post for a whole night and to carry on from a small concrete dug-out near by; they took the telephone with them. When they returned, they found the seat scarred by a fragment and several jagged pieces of metal on the floor: a shell had burst three yards away in the offshoot sap. The wood in which their billet lay concealed was searched three or four times with 'whizz-bangs,' some of which fell very close. They lived well in a large sand-bag hut, divided into one large room (occupied by a field-ambulance section) and two small, the one containing four bunks, the other one bunk and a table that served for meals by day and a bed at night. Meals were timed to suit the changes-over. They had a daily ration of rum at this period: this had never happened before, and it never happened afterwards; it was recognised that this was a strenuous and exacting turn on post, for they remained there the whole time that any of the four

battalions was in the trenches. For the first time they had a special cook; by urgent representations to headquarters they succeeded in making an institution of the precedence. The days were chilly but for the most part dry, the nights freezing; but the 1917-18 winter was both drier and warmer than that of 1916-17; not that they had any unseasonable 'heat-waves.' On Christmas day each man received a Red Cross plum-pudding and every two a Maconochie (rarely seen, always enjoyed), and the artillery of both sides fired only a few perfunctory shells. During the last week, duty was heavy, for several men went on Paris leave: in the day, no great hardship, but at night two men did twelve hours between them in periods of three hours each, while the other slept in a dug-out thirty yards away. When Frank was on night-duty, he and his companion looked at a small, strong, and uncomfortable sleeping shelter and rejected it for a larger, flimsy and comfortable one; in the morning they found that the rejected shelter had been flattened out by a five-nine, despite its strength. The view sent a nasty cold shiver down Frank's spine as he realised once more how dangerous it was to make any choice at all.

The brigade went out of the line for about four weeks. At first in huts near the line and then in the barn of a château many miles back, the observers kept the cold at bay with tolerable success. Felipé was away in England as an instructor at a machine-gun school. But even on Salisbury Plain, as Frank learnt from one of his rare letters, he was unfortunate: he had been called on to explain how somebody careless could shoot himself with the machine-gun used in the class a little while before; resenting the attitude of the officer holding the enquiry, he justified himself tersely and somewhat

caustically (for instance he remarked: 'a machine-gun is not fool-proof'); the officer hastily acquitted him.

Early in February 1918, Frank obtained Paris leave (six days). His furlough commenced at midnight, and he would normally have caught the train departing from Steenvoorde at six o'clock. But always a trier, he had a shot at reaching Paris at noon instead of at night. Picking up his passport and railway ticket at five o'clock the previous afternoon, he walked the three dark and dreary miles to Steenvoorde, where, after nosing about for some time, he persuaded an English driver and fireman to take him in their solitary engine as far as they were going. He descended at Hazebrouck, but there he found that he could get no train before that which he would have caught anyway. From a military policeman he discovered that he might possibly be able to pass the night at an English depot, to which he trudged. After being challenged at the bayonet-point by a zealous Tommy and received very coldly by a mystified orderly-room corporal, he made the former laugh and extracted from the latter a chit authorising him to sleep in an outlying dormitory. The orderly to whom he went first stared and then showed him a bunk. Frank suggested that if he were awakened in good time and brought some food, he would be disposed to do the decent thing; a five-franc note greatly pleased the Tommy, as well it might in those days. After a packed train, the men were motored from the Gare du Nord, Paris, to the leave-depot, where they received a large meal, a list of cheap recommended hotels, general advice for their holiday, an extremely lurid account of the charms exercised by, and the diseases contracted from, French prostitutes, and a warning against the cultivation of promiscuous familiarity with Parisian

*midinettes*; Frank was much interested in the doctor's assumption that, without exception, all those men badly needed his advice. He proceeded to have a quiet, thoroughly restful holiday.

The return journey was less pleasant, for from Calais he had to travel—it was a bitterly cold night—in an unheated carriage. Transport officers 'didn't quite know' where his brigade's headquarters were now: he passed the night at Amiens while they found out. Retracing his route, and walking for miles in an almost complete circle, he at last tracked headquarters down, on the edge of an attractive village in Picardy. At the beginning of March, the section returned to another post on the Armentières front. Into a ruined house, almost three-quarters of a mile from the line, a concrete observation-tower had been built behind the partially-standing forward wall. From the foot of the iron ladder by which one mounted to the solitary, unbacked seat of the post itself (the space beneath gaped unpleasantly till one forced oneself to ignore it), ran a short passage, which gave, by some steps to the left, into a small dormitory containing four bunks sleeping two apiece, and, to the right on the same level, into a small living-room where three could sleep and where the section ate and yarned. Of these rooms, both built very strongly in concrete, the former had water a foot deep on the floor, which was three feet beneath the surface; in fact, there was a special pump for the draining of this ducks' paradise, where one reached the bunks by the aid of gymnastics and heavy planks. The other room was dry enough, except for the walls, which glistened with moisture; the floor was merely damp. The tower was perfectly dry, and though it would not have stood the impact of a five-nine, it would probably have resisted

a seventy-seven. When the shells began to whistle past, one was not quite so sure about the strength of that tower. The observing, all in all, was interesting but chilly work. On their eight miles' march to a new rest billet, they made a slight detour in order to visit a small estaminet on the outskirts of Armentières. The room was filled with soldiers, who drank much beer, smoked like chimneys, talked noisily, and playfully courted the two blooming, sturdy girls: the latter had stayed in the town long after most of its inhabitants departed. A thoroughly heartening scene, from which the observers tore themselves with difficulty. Having changed billets two or three times, they occupied some huts not far from Armentières. These huts were adequately protected from bombs, unless they were very heavy or a direct hit was made, by strong sand-bag walls about four feet high. While at this camp, Frank saw Felipé marching along the road with a detachment from England. The corporal, much the better for his three months on Salisbury Plain, was so energetic that he visited the observers twice and convulsed them with his picture of the machine-gun school, and entertained his pal spiritedly when the latter strolled over to his old battalion. Close by was another friend, whom Frank saw occasionally: Pearse, a Queensland 'Varsity man, who, an exact contemporary with Frank, had taken his degree in March 1917 and almost immediately enlisted; the old hand marvelled when he saw his small, frail form bravely shouldering a pack that ought, by rights, to have broken his spirit. But this man, with honours in Classics, a profound attachment to philosophic studies, and a passionate love of English literature, route-marched and dug trenches and received a very severe wound with an endurance that one admired while one thought

it impossible for him to carry on. Honywood can find, from a mass of memories, no finer example of spirit dominating physical frailty than this of Pearse, whom he believes to have a remarkable future as a writer—if only he gets the chance. He was a true 'student in arms.'

The troops had discussed the results of the Russian débâcle and very clearly foreseen 'a rough passage' for the Allies unless and until the Americans came in with thousands to reinforce them. The news of the German offensive late in March did not, therefore, surprise them, but the gravity of the reports nonplussed them; in fact they did not believe the rumours until the official *communiqués* (posted regularly throughout the war on the battalion, brigade-headquarters and other notice-boards) forced belief on them. Many of the Australians were rushed to the Somme. A very conclusive proof of urgency they saw in the fact that they actually went part of the way—*via* St. Pol and Doullens—in trains, for that was a rare procedure with Colonial troops; for the matter of that, they rarely embussed. They detrained at Amiens, itself close to the foremost German thrust. In the dawn they marched through the silent streets of the hospitable city that remembers all British soldiers with affection and Australians with gratitude. Like Albert, Amiens was a frequent rallying-point and base of supplies. From the suburbs of Amiens they proceeded to a village a few miles distant and there remained for the rest of the day; at night they marched obliquely a short stage; there seemed, indeed, to be some doubt as to the exact position they were to occupy in the line. When definite orders arrived, they moved another stage—again obliquely—and halted for an afternoon and a night at a château, the men sleeping in an old hay-shed; 'Jerry' shelled them most of the time

they were there, fortunately at long intervals and with very little damage, his range being decidedly faulty. The next morning, early, the brigade went into the line, the observers to their billet, their movements hidden by a mist lying in the low valley that separated the combatants. The billet was in the cellar of a two-storeyed, six-roomed house, shared by the observers with the snipers; the building stood at an unimportant cross-roads on flat land, with a hamlet a hundred yards to the half-right and, directly in front at about two hundred yards, a sugar-refinery, a cellar of which was used as a billet by the observers after Frank left them. It seemed strange to be fighting in country that had, a few weeks earlier, lain well to the rear of the British line; four hundred yards in front of the billet stood a Y.M.C.A. hut, partly demolished by a German shell. From the small library the two sections took a number of books, enough to last them for the three May weeks passed in this neighbourhood; one was an historical romance by Marjorie Bowen. To the left of the billet was the low hill, on which, well forward, they dug a pit; further away and further back, Brigade Headquarters had their orderly-room and non-combatant details below a dip of the same hill. This was a district of which the most interesting villages were Ribemont and Morlancourt, and the observers could survey with ease the enemy trench on the hills beyond the valley. The Germans had the better position, for their reserve line occupied a slope higher than the Australian trenches. To reach the post, the observers walked first some five hundred yards to the left along the road leading straight past the billet and then, from a stone they set up as a landmark, they went off to the right, at an angle of precisely ninety degrees, and carefully stepped four hundred and

twenty yards. To the uninitiated these details are doubtless extremely boring, but when a post stands on the shoulder of a hill in the full sight of any German provided with a telescope, when that hill is bare of shelter and devoid of landmarks, and when the pit constituting the observation-post cannot, from the ground, be seen more than twenty yards in broad daylight, it is vitally necessary to choose unerringly that route which, while the sun shines, will afford the maximum cover in the form of undulations in the ground, and which at night, however dark or however dangerous, will enable the relief, in the case of their predecessors being killed or seriously wounded, to proceed straight to the spot. At this first post, things being still somewhat haphazard, they had no telephone; but after ten days they moved a quarter of a mile further off, in a somewhat less conspicuous position, and insisted on a wire being laid. In the latter circumstances, all they had to do at night was to find where the line left the road and to follow it up. Once the wire was cut in several places, thus giving them a certain incentive to get down on their knees to 'pick up the thread.' As this was a lively sector, the enemy chafing at the resistance offered by 'those damned Aussies,' the observers received strict instructions to communicate to the Brigade Major any suspicious sign. On several occasions the hill from which they worked was hotly shelled, but their luck held good; the cross-roads were 'peppered' vigorously now and then; and once, having apparently decided that the road running directly to the left was in far too good condition, the enemy made an unsuccessful effort to render it impassable. When the observers had gone in, there was practically nothing in the way of communication-saps; when they left, several saps had been dug.

They came out at the end of May; Frank had run across Felipé, several days before, at the cross-roads by the billet. The first stop was at Querrieu, the charming hamlet that adjoins Pont-Noyelles. Brigade had its headquarters at the château of Querrieu, where Frank did sentry-go from five till eight one morning, despite his aches and pains: he had gradually become weaker and weaker, had for the last two months been able to march more than four miles only with difficulty, had collapsed several times on long route-marches, and was now feeling particularly unwell. The Medical Officer immediately sent him away with a serious attack of tonsilitis. He went to an American hospital at Rouen, where the tonsilitis followed its natural course and disappeared; but trench-fever had supervened.

## VI: EXIT FELIPÉ

From Rouen Frank was sent to a hospital about a mile from Stratford-on-Avon, where he remained until late in July. On reporting at Horseferry Road, Westminster, he told the doctor that he still felt too weak to go on furlough. 'Rubbish, man! you're all right. Leave will fix you up.' Four days later he had a relapse of trench-fever at Bristol, and there he had a month in an auxiliary hospital. After three weeks in camp on Salisbury Plain, he took out the balance of his furlough in London and Scotland. When he returned from leave, he was found by the doctors to be still too debilitated for service at the front; he was kept at Sutton Veny, near Warminster, as an orderly-clerk. On one of several four-day furloughs to London, he met with Borella, the battalion's second V.C., drawing money at the Commonwealth Bank: a very gentle, quiet, modest and unassuming Queenslander, whose promotion had been slow just because of his retiring nature but who had always been liked by the men for his unceasingly considerate treatment of them and for his shy bravery, a quality well known among them before a conspicuously gallant action attracted the general attention.

To Frank the Armistice came as something unreal. The War had so impressed him with its futility and stupidity and cruelty, above all with its apparent inability to stop, that he thought it could end only through a miracle. Instead, then, of joining in the celebrations at Warminster or wishing himself in London, he sat

quietly in the deserted orderly-room and slowly considered just what this change would mean; gradually a profound joy, an immense relief possessed him, and he went for a short stroll along the road.

Several days before Christmas, he embarked for home in an old German cargo-boat that took weeks to reach Brisbane. The voyage was agreeable with a multiplicity of ship's sports, educational classes, and various ingenious competitions; no drill, but physical exercises every morning. Frank and another man amused themselves—and escaped fatigues—by running a ship's journal, which they issued twice a week from Malta to Adelaide; the best of the contributions, with rather more of new matter, Frank, on returning to Brisbane, edited as a souvenir for all aboard—a memory book of the war in general and of the return voyage in particular.

He returned, like so many others, with a good record and no decoration (except for long service: he had been lucky). For himself he did not mind, but he grew indignant when he thought how Felipé had served, so gallantly and so well, without recognition. During the first year after his home-coming, Frank, while finding it easy enough to readapt himself to civilian conditions and to an undergraduate's life, suffered from a terrible restlessness, from which he escaped during the day but which fastened on him at night so that he had to get out and walk himself tired or dull his senses at a cinema or inflict himself on friends: to be alone and inactive in the evening was hell; gradually this moral malaise weakened, and in the second year after his return he was troubled by it with increasing rarity. He often thought of Felipé, and when his restlessness was most poignant he would read several of his letters. The last had been written in August 1918 at Rouen, where, slightly

wounded, he missed a general evacuation to England through being absent with a book when the senior medical officer made his round. 'I've lost my chance,' he said; 'Fate never forgives a thing like that.' A mutual friend wrote at the end of September: 'Dear Honywood, I have some bad news for you. Yes, Hicks. When I saw him just before the stunt at ——, and wished him luck, he said: "It's the end this time; I've had a long spin." He asked me to write to you if anything happened. Poor devil! he got a bullet through the brain, as he was going across No Man's Land. Damned rotten, isn't it? Yours ever, Fred Williams.' What helped Frank most was to remember that Felipé had had a very thin time of it and would have been grateful for the pleasures of peace. And he would perhaps read the following letter, written by Felipé to a friend of Frank's:

*Mar.* 7, '18.

Dear Miss Johnston,

I was surprised, not to say pleased, to get a letter from you, as I was quite unaware that Frank had asked you to write to me. Your letter was pleasant, interesting and sane, so different from those of the misguided but well-meaning girls who write to 'lonely soldiers' without saying anything, or else making them feel lonelier. Perhaps you don't know that I'm lucky enough to be in England at present; over here for a few months as machine-gun instructor. Not a bad stunt, and, of course, there's much more comfort here than in h - - - Flanders. Believe me, I appreciate it and only wish Frank were here, for he's a decent old chap, the only man I really care about in the A.I.F.

Before I proceed, let me correct you. I am *not* looking for more promotion; Frank and I are about the two most unambitious men, from a military viewpoint, in the company, and our remarks are almost seditious at times.

I find it rather difficult to write you anything of interest, war

talk being out of the question. So I suppose I must refer to your letter. You say that *It's just dusk, and the Queensland darkness comes with a rush.* Yes, you haven't the beautiful English twilight, but you have some sun. I don't know how it is, but writing at night I generally get different, sometimes false, ideas from when writing in daylight. The latter is conducive to truth, so it seems to me, whereas the night brings romance and dreams: pretty much alike these two, but often wrong when viewed in the cold grey dawn. This darkness is *provocative of many philosophic musings.*—Hum! But why be philosophic? A young philosopher is an old fool, they say. But that is not polite, even if true. I wonder if it is true? Anyway, I always imagine that a philosopher has cold blood, but don't take notice of what I say, because, as our friend Frank will tell you, I make most sweeping statements; I believe he's right.

As for your *tremendous resolutions*—don't; resolutions and ambition are two joy-killers and ought to be suppressed. *Is death the only leveller?*—Don't ask me, I've never been that way, although at times death has been most alluring to me, in France for instance. —— is evidently some town, *prosperous and respectable.* All right, no objection to its respectability if that quality doesn't make for dullness; it so often does, I think you will agree. As for the *religious calm pervading the whole neighbourhood,*—delightful; wish I were there now, not to be religious but quiet, 'for where we are is hell and where hell is, there must we ever be'—till something happens. *There are no pubs, no picture-shows, no nothing:* is it an Australian town you write of? No pubs, horrors! What is there to live for, then? '*Somewhere a voice is calling*': the neighbours chirp, do they? What voice? As for the highbrows playing in the dim light 'O Star of Eve,' that's just the light it should be played in, I think, and anyway it's a piece I like very much; played on a 'cello—I almost weep; but not quite. Another one, the 'Barcarolle' from *Tales of Hoffman.* Heard a Fritz singing this one night in No Man's Land, just a few minutes before we went over the top. Wonder if he was killed in our barrage.

No, I don't think you would bore me stiff, as you predict: we'd find something to talk about. *Perhaps you'd be one of those*

*fellows who'd even vouchsafe a remark*. I might, but I like listening, for when a man's listening he isn't telling on himself. They say (whoever 'they' are): 'Give most men a good listener and most women enough note-paper and they will tell all they know.'

*Spasm 2*

When you describe that nice little supper-party, you mention eggs. Please describe an egg when you write; never see one, nor sugar; all the sweetness has gone out of our lives. As for the morning-after feeling, what's it matter? 'Live well the hour —and let it go,' say I; and that reminds me of the days before the war, back in dear old San Francisco, but that's another story. *What are your politics?* You might as well throw a bucket of iced water down one's back as to commence a conversation by asking that. If you had two friends, world-travellers, you found plenty to talk about; men of the world are sometimes so much men of the world as to be nothing in the world, says Wilde.

You mention Omar Khayyam. Great friend of Frank and myself; also Hafiz. Don't care much for poetry, but these two interest me, perhaps because they are—well, not exactly immoral; but they make an excuse for our doings if these aren't quite proper; it really *does* seem as though human nature desired to follow the line of least resistance. I do as a rule, and find it pleasant—for a while.

You say you have my photo in front of you, trying to read my character. Haven't one. If I look like *a shrewd cuss*, my looks belie me. I generally manage to get taken down by all comers, that is, men, for it wouldn't do to admit of a woman getting the better of me. The pointed moustache was a 'get-up,' since regretted, but when in France. . . . My 12-year old niece disapproved of it and said I looked like the Kaiser. What flatterers girls are! And then you say, *Don't grow too accustomed to your damnable dagger*. Delicious; I like you for that. But I hope you don't think I've been so rude as to kill Germans with it; not in my line.

Lucky you. Don't girls have a good time? You ought to see them in London. War's a fine thing—if you are not a warrior.

This finishes your letter and ought to finish me, but one might as well write a lot at a time. So if you are yawning by now, forgive me. I shall run down to the recreation-hut and get a cup of non-conformist tea and a sawdust cake. Exit Felipé.

### *Chapter 3. Fovant*

Such is the name of this camp. It is one of the largest penal settlements in England. Leave is very scarce, duties in plenty—and then some. There are, however, some very interesting old villages around here, churches and inns of other days, which seem to interest the *average* Australian very little. Pubs we have, which shows our superiority to your suburb; and loud and merry are the roisterers at closing time. Country lasses, with 'beefy face and grubby 'ands' are at a premium, and not a few gallant, heavy-breathing Anzacs are to be seen walking down the grove after sundown, telling the old, old tale, perhaps a little more coloured than usual—but still, the old tale. I'm not so lucky. Life here is dull, that's putting it mildly. We have a picture-show, which screens all the latest films up to 1898 A.D. Also vaudeville stunts, ladies of the 33rd class music-halls, some with voices, others—without. The concert parties that frequently visit us are as a rule very good, although any lady who sings anything a little superior does not meet with the treatment I should like. The Y.M.C.A. library contains a most chaste set of books, General Booth's *Darkest England*, poems by Ellen Wheeler Whitesox, which tell you what a beautiful life this is, *The Family Herald* for 1855, etc., etc. I am not a subscriber so perhaps prejudiced.... Just a moment while I fill my pipe. Thank you.

* * * * * * * *

Of course you started all this noise, so don't blame me. I know a fellow here, he's married, poor chap, who pours out his soul twenty pages at a time, to his wife—he's *newly* married. So surely you can put up with this.

Egotism is strong in the male animal, so if I mention a few facts about myself you won't mind.

Exhibit 1, Myself:—I am old enough to know better, so

past 30. Look more(?), feel sometimes—any age. My friends call me an old crank, my enemies—whew!

My nationality, English by accident, perhaps a little cosmopolitan by choice. Have travelled in a few countries, been to some places the average tourist doesn't go to; never looked for much adventure, never had much; am single, hope to remain so.

Have never been entirely to the devil, having found it as difficult to be entirely bad as to be entirely good, which is according to Wilde's idea.

Temperament:—Pessimistic; that is, I try to tell the truth, reading the future on the past, and sometimes bitter experience. Was accused once by Frank of having a 'conscience,' but as he's a friend, that doesn't count.

Tastes:—Dark-haired widows (over 25), cats, photography, books of most kinds worth while, and anything of a mechanical nature. Hate politics and wowsers,[1] small boys and noise. Love good music but don't understand it, fond of rich unhealthy food, good cigars and plenty of sleep. Like my own way (generally wrong) but don't often get it.

### *Chapter* 4

'And on the second day—'

Concerning Frank, or 'James' as I call him.

Came in contact with him just before we landed on the Peninsula. He was seated on a hatch-cover reading a novel in French, quite oblivious of any coming strife. Ventured a remark—so did he; more remarks, remarks returned. Thus our friendship, which is of the lasting kind.

I think he's one of the most impracticable, lovable old pagans one could meet. We shared the same dug-out. Frank and I built it with our own fair hands, and then lay down to die in it, both of us being sick unto death. It was a charming life: did our own cooking,—'straordinary cooking that; I made the bully-beef stew and 'James' boiled the rice—I have never forgiven him his fondness for rice. The meal over, we used to

[1] This word is probably familiar only to Australians; it designates unco' guid persons. Having a pejorative connotation, it implies condemnation of hypocrisy, of ostentatious religion, and of interfering morality.

adjourn to the drawing-room (by lying on our backs, dropping the sack—I mean curtain), and after I had filled my pipe, why, we were all set. What did we talk about? Oh, poetry, peace, books, music, travel, sometimes girls, in short everything unattainable at that time. Perhaps I would provoke a thought, then 'James' with a far-away look would start slowly on some subject or other. He gave me an awful headache one night when he got on to metaphysics. You see, I didn't know there was 'sich an animal.' But those were the days all right, gone for ever—thank heaven! When my turn came to stump up a yarn, I used to tell him about the good old days, in California, Japan, South America, or some other place I had visited, and I hope the recording angel was asleep when I occasionally wandered from the path of veracity. Thus sped the hours. But I like our 'James'; he's different. We are good pals—cut each other's throats with Continental politeness, contradict each other at suitable intervals, sometimes we agree but mostly don't. He's taught me a few things worth while. I'd give my wealth, even my beauty, to possess . . .[1]

Woman are angels, but it takes only two to make a hell. I don't mean to say anything disparaging about women. God knows how I wish I had one to talk to now—just to talk to. How I want to talk to someone. Did y'ever find yourself in a crowd with no one to talk to? This place is it. Soldiers, soldiers everywhere; the same old talk—pubs, horse-racing, and—oh, the usual; as it was in the beginning—of the war, so it remains.

Thanks for your enquiry as to my nerves. Yes, they were pretty bad, after I received the concussion of a shell at Bullecourt; it about finished me. Fact is, scientific warfare is ahead of human nature; this constant strain of shell-fire makes one a coward at last, although few admit it.

By daily dosing myself with Phosferine I hope eventually to become human.

This isn't perhaps the kind of letter you want; but we never get what we want, or if we *do*, we find it was not worth waiting

[1] Even the desire to reproduce this letter literally could not justify the reproduction of a far too complimentary passage: 'as he's a friend, that doesn't count.'

for. If I have been lengthy to the point of boredom, forgive me, for as I said before: I had shell-shock, which is as bad as being blown up by a woman—but not so interesting.

You will perhaps be kind enough to send me a photo of yourself. You haven't one? Oh, yes, just look in the right-hand drawer, in the left corner, under those gloves and handkerchiefs, etc., and you will find one. Thanks!

If you write me again, please send letter to address of my brother; he will forward it to me, as I may be back in France, or I may be—who knows?

Yours sincerely,

JIM HICKS,
*alias* FELIPÉ.

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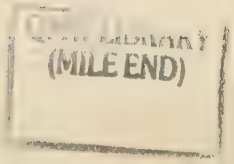

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